LOST PATHS™



Alyl-i-Batin and Taftani

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Ayl-i-Batin and Taftani



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INTRODUCTION



As the Year of the Scarab crosses Middle Eastern lands, old factions come to light once more. Long before even the vaunted Order of Hermes assembled its magical theories, practitioners of elemental magic rode the earliest currents of civilization. The Taftâni recognized the visage of Truth and spoke it freely. With their convictions they brought forth mastery of flame and power. Truth, once spoken, became real. The Batini, by contrast, moved in shadows; the subtle masters believed Truth so sublime that the greatest truths were invisible. From twisted labyrinths and hidden sancta the cautious mages direct plans so convoluted that, perhaps, the very plots may outlive their creators.

The Batini and Taftâni are thought gone — artifacts of an earlier age of mysteries. The Traditions ignore them and the Technocracy considers them little more than clean-up work. And, as far as the mages of the Middle East are concerned, that's just fine.

Batini and Taftâni may not agree on much, but they both acknowledge that truth cannot be suppressed. It's just a matter of time. With the Reckoning here and Armageddon at hand, the final chance for Truth has arrived.

Within this book you'll find a chance to illuminate that Truth! You can play the Taftâni or Batini, recognize the power of the still-extant djinn and fit the Year of the Scarab into your **Mage** game. Here's hoping you survive it....

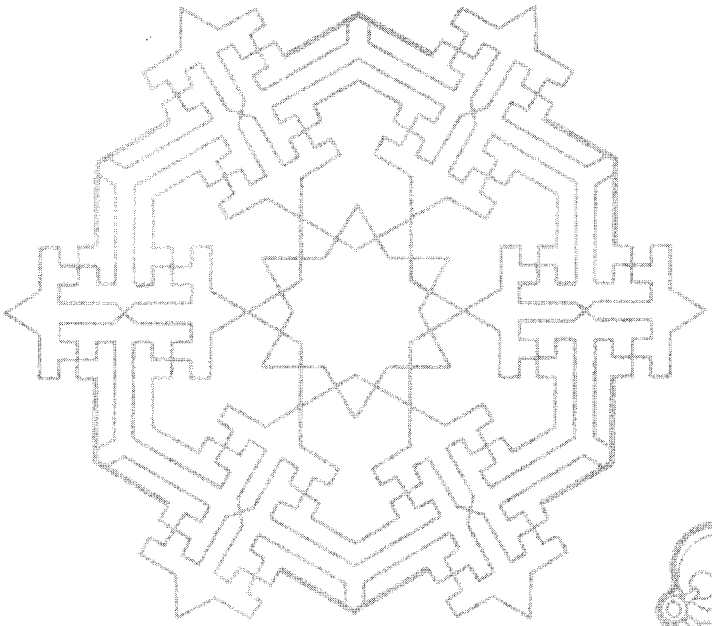
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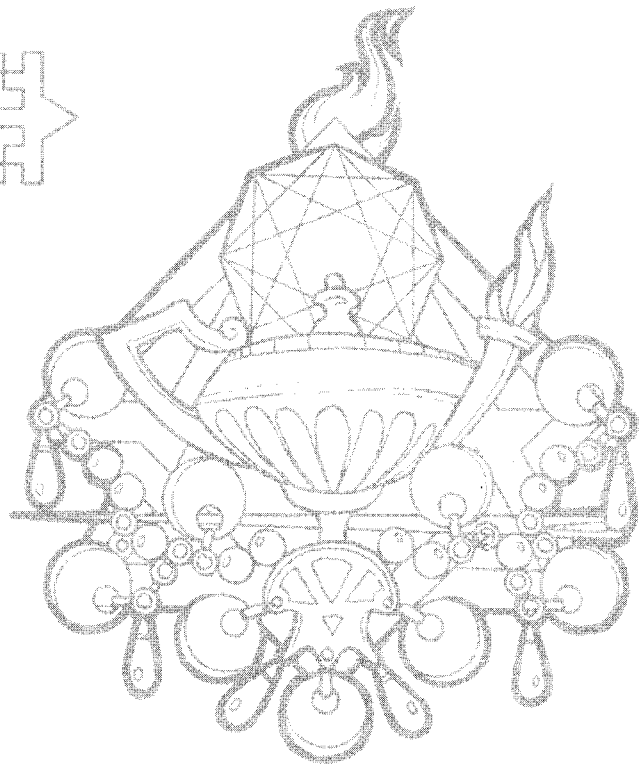
Chapter One: Ahl-i-Batin lays bare the secrets of the Subtle Ones. From the Night of Fana (and before), the Batini have espoused hidden Unity. While they could not realize that Unity fully among the Traditions,

they wisely chose to work through stealth, thereby saving themselves from the deadly attentions of hostile Technocrats and competing mages. Advisors, mystics, seers and scientists make up their ranks; the Batini still move unseen among the many levels of their home society. From their origins as philosopher-naturalists and explorers of thought to their present incarnations as hidden political forces and subtle walkers of labyrinthine secrets, the Batini tell a compelling story.

Chapter Two: Taftâni explores the flamboyantly destructive Weavers of legend. Driven by their creed to espouse truth, even painful truth, the Taftâni practice wildly visible and spectacular magic. Everything from bottled djinn to flying carpets and rains of fire reside in the Taftâni bailiwick, a praxis that has survived for longer than most of the Traditions. But the modern world has little patience for these fractious wizards, and they rapidly dwindle in numbers and power. Even as they teeter on the verge of extinction, the Taftâni continue their displays of honest magic, the better to drive a wedge into the Consensus and remind people that magic *is* real!

Chapter Three: Djinn peels back the layer of the Invisible World to reveal the beings of smokeless fire, the djinn. While some argue that djinn are merely a class of spirits, the djinn themselves have a culture, a history and a proud tradition not found in other spirits of nature. Where the other Umbral hierarchies bend according to odd rules or whims or as a result of personal pacts, the whole of the djinn respond to the Code of Solomon and eschew the formal ties of other spirits. As ally or antagonist, the djinn remain magical beings who watch over humanity, whether for good or ill. And, of course, the Taftâni (and others) often trap the djinn's magics for human uses. How have these Sultans of the air survived? Better than some other Bygones....






X



Chapter One: Ahl-i-Batin

Prelude: The Things They'll Overlook



Hlethlahla wore the skin of a plump German businesswoman as she prowled the international terminal of the Cairo airport looking for her prey. It didn't fit as well as it should have; the desert heat had shrunk the skin just a bit, making it pucker where the tiny spider-silk sutures stitched it to her face, neck and wrists. Oddly enough, no one seemed to notice. Perhaps they thought it was just a skin condition or the wrinkles of senescence. It's amazing what people will overlook if they're not expecting it. The ruthless killer instincts honed by contact with too much suffering surfaced again, and the mask of normalcy almost slipped. Hlethlahla may not have been terribly bright — not much of a mind left after all that conditioning — but she was a very good actress.

This was Hlethlahla's ninth TorK. TorK was Nephandic slang for "turn or kill," and it was their preferred technique for dealing with mages who suffered from what her master had called "insufficient ethical flexibility." Her last target had been a much-ballyhooed Hermetic Quaesitor who screamed like a burning cat the whole way to the Caul — probably because he couldn't speak because she'd bitten his tongue out to prevent him from saying his mumbo jumbo angel talk. She didn't take him out with witch's milk because her orders were to make him walk the labyrinth as soon as possible. She was proud of him, though. When she put him on the Labyrinth, he walked it like it was his destiny. And really, wasn't it?

The victim du jour was an Ahl-i-Batin. Why they had sent a pro like Hlethlahla after a glorified djinn-jockey from a soon to be forgotten has-been Tradition like the Batini was beyond her. She'd known a few of the Iblisi. Business contacts mostly. Iblisi were the Ahl-i-Batin who'd been so sure that they were incorruptible that they waltzed merrily into the Cauls on their own and then found out at the last minute that corruption doesn't look the same on the inside as it does from the outside. In time, they found out that they kind of liked it.

According to the dossier, the target would be at gate 3, heading to Albuquerque by way of Brussels and New York City. He was a control nut, so he would probably be early. Hlethlahla was to make sure he never boarded his plane. She

only had a vague idea of what the target looked like. The picture in the dossier was a little fuzzy, and it didn't stick in her memory as well as such things usually do. She would have to be especially careful.

There were two people at gate 3, a blonde woman, obviously from America, and a respectable looking Arab man in an Armani suit. The smell of magic was all over him.

She sat in the seat across from him and smiled when he glanced up at her. He kept trying to pay attention to his London Times, but Hlethlahla was making it difficult. She spread her legs a bit and released the enhanced pheromones that would seal his fate. The hollow lamprey teeth around her aureolae were full of witch's milk and grinding in anticipation of the impending injection.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hlethlahla saw the American woman approach her. She smiled in that cheap American way (spread around the world by pictures of Monica Lewinsky) and said, "Hi! I don't mean to disturb you or anything, but I think you've made a terrible mistake. I can help you with that if you'll follow me to the restroom." Saying that, the blonde walked down the concourse to the women's room.

Hlethlahla was stunned. Could she have made a mistake? Certainly, the Arab seemed a shamefully easy target; even now he was gazing at her with unbridled lust, adjusting himself in a rather obvious fashion. She sniffed for the scent of magic again. Nothing. He was normal.

It was the American.

Hlethlahla leapt from her seat and made a beeline for the women's room. The sudden movement tore her womanskin a bit, but Hlethlahla paid it no attention. She wouldn't need it for more than a few minutes more now.

There was no one in the white tiled bathroom. Ten empty stalls. Ten old porcelain sinks. Ten mirrors. Hlethlahla's reflection filled the first mirror. The next eight mirrors were empty. In the last mirror Hlethlahla saw the face of the American woman with her idiot smile.

I shall break that mirror! thought the Nephandus. Then let's see her laugh.

With a howl unbecoming a woman, Hlethlahla lunged at the farthest mirror and punched it, her chitin-coated knuckles pulped the womanskin and shattered the mirror and several tiles behind the glass.

The stench of magic was everywhere. She heard the American's voice again. "I think you've made a terrible mistake." The sentence echoed off the tile like a ricocheting bullet. "I think you've made a terrible mistake." The lamprey teeth were starting to itch from all their gnawing.

Hlethlahla had made a terrible mistake. A terrible mistake. A mistake so terrible her master would punish her. He would punish her as she had never been punished. She imagined the agonies he would inflict on her.

No. Punishment was for simple mistakes. This was a terrible mistake. For this, she would suffer forever. Never before had a mistake of this magnitude been made by someone of her ranking. It was unheard of. The other Prelati would laugh at her. Laugh.

Terrible mistake.

Hlethlahla pulled the ceramic dagger from its sheath beneath her skirt. If she died here, far from her Gilledean master, at least her soul would have a head start.

From her place within the mirror (which she noted with no lack of irony) the blond woman watched the suicidal Nephandus plunge the knife into her chest and abdomen thirteen times before a death rattle cleared her throat and the body slumped.

The Batini assassin stepped out of the mirror and paused in the restroom to clean up. As she brushed her hair, the blonde color faded away and her natural brown remained. When she washed her face, the white and pink complexion dripped into the sink revealing her own face beneath.

She looked at the body of the Nephandus again. Once the illusion of stench — enough to drive people away for a short time — faded from the entrance to the bathroom, someone was going to find the cadaver. So be it, she thought. The Technocracy would cover everything up neatly, but then again, maybe they wouldn't, and this would be the incident that opened people's eyes.

In any case, she wasn't going to touch the Filthy One. Clean-up wasn't her problem.

Thinking back on the job as she was walking out of the restroom, the Batini was a little surprised at how undisciplined the Unclean One was, how willing she was to trust in mere appearances. It's amazing, she thought, what people will overlook if they're not expecting it.

Glossary

The Ahl-i-Batin take their sobriquet "The Subtle Ones" extremely seriously. They do not create whole new vocabularies or use exotic words. Most Batini are from Middle Eastern cultures, typically Arabic or Semitic peoples, and most of their nomenclature derives from the languages of those people and places. They utilize the language of the culture around them and imbue certain words with mystical or esoteric meaning that they may or may not have in quotidian usage. An Ahl-i-Batin mage in America is likely to use words that are relatively common in American parlance, and make limited, if any, use of these terms which would be considered "rude" or "blatant" by most Batini:

Ahl al-'adl wa 'l-tawhad: "The People of Justice and Divine Unity." The Ahl-i-Batin's highly formal internal name for themselves, used rarely and only in highly ceremonial settings, like a murid's becoming a murshid or a formal decree of hostility against an enemy of the Tradition (i.e., the official assignment of assassins to kill said enemy).

Al-Insan al-Kamil: "The One Who Is Complete," "The Perfect One." A mage who has been raised up to rule the universe as the Unity's agent.

Al-Khidr: "The Green One." A mysterious figure thought to be an Oracle who offers blessings, protection and mystical initiation.

Baraka: The blessings of discipline; generally refers to the ability to perform magic.

Batin: Literally, "Interior." Subtle. Esoteric. Hidden.

Fana; Completion; Extinction. Ending. The Night of Fana refers to the passing away of the powerful and past-ancient Entity known as *Ihn Talaqin* — the Entelechy.

Faqir: "Holy ascetic beggar." The common term for Subtle Ones trained as Darwushim in the Baghdad *khanate*.

Ghayba: "Occultation" or "unbeingness." A state certain extremist Ahl-i-Batin achieve whereby they cannot be sensed by physical, electronic or magical means.

Hafiz: "Guardian" or "keeper." An Ahl-i-Batin scholar who commits an entire sacred text to memory, sometimes with the help of Mind magic. (Plural: *hafizi*)

Hanif: A pure, non-denominational monotheist. What the Batini strive to be.

Iblisi: Depending on your sources, the Iblisi are either a sect of Ahl-i-Batin who thought themselves immune to Nephandic corruption and entered the Cauls to fight the Nephandi on their own grounds and became *barabbi*, or they are a group of Ahl-i-Batin double agents operating out of Nephandic labyrinths who make "small sacrifices" in order to provide the Ahl-i-Batin with current information on the actions of the Filthy Ones.

Ihram: A state of ritual purity that Batini prefer to be in before practicing magic.

Imam: "Leader." The most educated member of any given Batini unit and, therefore, the one who reports to the Qutb and maintains discipline. Most commonly used to refer to the leader of a *jama'a*. (Plural: *imami*)

Isfret: Chaos, disorder, imbalance.

Jabarut: Divine omnipotence.

Jahannum: Hell.

Jama'a: Literally "community" or "group." A covert cell of Batini scholars and, sometimes, consors living together in a *zawiya*.

Kafir: Infidel.

Khanate: One of the five training schools of the Ahl-i-Batin. Each has its own course of study and is led by its own Murshid.

Khilwat: "Silence." Old Batini term for an Ahl-i-Batin mage, referring to both the silent mind speech that the Batini prefer and to what an enemy hears before a Subtle One strikes.

The term is commonly used today to denote a sacred assassin of the Ahl-i-Batin (as opposed to a scholar, an architect or the like).

Khwaja al-Akbar: The entity held by the Ahl-i-Batin to be a divine being, the creator of the Ahl-i-Batin, and the revealer of the Doctrine of Unity.

Mahdi: "Guide" or "leader." Messianic figure who will appear at the end of the world and usher in a new order. Possibly the Al-Insan al-Kamil (cf); may be the mentioned leader in the Prophecy of the Phoenix.

Ma'rifa: Mystical knowledge, understanding or power. The Batini conceptualization of Quintessence.

Mi'raj: Ascension.

Muh'rim: One who is in the ritual state of *ihrim*.

Mutasawwif: "One who has just begun his way along the path." A Batini who has just Awakened.

Mu'jiza: A "miracle" or magical Effect.

Murids: Relatively inexperienced students of the Tariqa who may have learned the secrets of the Spheres up to the third Rank, but no higher (i.e. Disciples).

Murshids: Those Batini who have achieved Rank 4 or higher in a Sphere and have been fully initiated into the tariqa (i.e. Adepts).

Muwahhid: A believer in the Tenth Sphere of Unity (*tawhid*) Pl: Muwahhidun

Nabi: Literally "Prophet." A Batini mage who uses the Sphere of Time to see and foretell future events.

Najasa: Polluting matter; foulness; corruption. Frequently used to refer to the Nephandi or anything they have tainted.

Pir: A spiritual guide or magical teacher.

Qutb: A "pole" in the sense of "Axis mundi;"; also "saint." One of the Masters of the Mind Sphere who served as judges and reference points for what was, essentially, a telepathic network of minds.

Silsila: Literally "chain." The concept that everything is interwoven and connected to the Unity and, therefore, one. Also the Batini term for the Sphere of Correspondence.

Tariqa: The "Way" of the Ahl-i-Batin. Including the doctrine, physical, spiritual and mystical disci-

plines, specific techniques and Rotes of the Batini. It can also be used to refer to the Tradition as a whole.

Tawhid: Unity.

Wahdat al-wujud: The Arabic term for the Ahl-i-Batin's Doctrine of Unity.

Zahir: The opposite of Batin: Obvious, blatant, unsubtle, rude. Some Batini refer disparagingly to the Taftâni as the Ahl-i-Zahir: the Rude Ones. Used in this way, it has connotations both of "obnoxious" and "pathetically undisciplined."

Zawiya: Literally "Corner," as in the corner of a building or temple but commonly referring to a Batini retreat or cloister.

Zuhd: Asceticism.

History



Batini history stretches *far* back. Some believe that the Night of Fana was not the birth of the Batini, but rather a re-awakening of sorts. The oldest and most sacred of the Ahl-i-Batin texts, called the *Mushaf al-Isra* (the Great Book of Passage Through Night), asserts that those who become Ahl-i-Batin all have Avatars that come from an ancient spirit called "the Entelechy."

The Entelechy, according to the Mushaf al-Dar, was composed of the highly evolved souls of pre-historical mages that sought to unite and enlighten humanity in the interest of mankind's well-being. In the last Great Cycle it had been the role of those spirits to guide the dominant species to its destiny, though the Codex is extremely vague as to what that destiny might have been.

At the end of the last Great Cycle, the old civilization self-destructed. All life was extinguished, the oceans of the old world evaporated, the mountains turned to dust and the Entelechy was banished from the Tapestry by unnamed, but presumably unspeakably powerful, entities or natural laws.

The Night of Fana

In 514 BCE, thousands of eons after the Entelechy's banishment, the entities that banished the Entelechy had either passed from time or forgotten its existence. Enormous, world-shaking magic pulled, frayed and cut the strings of the Tapestry. It was enough to prick the Entelechy to wakefulness and call it back to a new and raging world.

The Entelechy's banishment ended. It returned to the Tellurian — where the enormous and bizarre magics of the new world promptly ripped it apart. The spiritual fragments of the Entelechy survived, but the Entelechy as it had previously known itself was extinguished.

The Akashic/Handura Conflict

The Akashic Brotherhood and the Handura branch of the Euthanatos were ripping the weave of reality with the forces they wielded in their ongoing conflict. Their war had been raging for four hundred years by that point. They were tired of the violence, but their hatred was unyielding, and the combat was vicious. Each side had vowed to sacrifice whatever was necessary to annihilate the other. The cycle of reincarnation saw souls and Avatars struck down only to reincarnate and return to the fray, more furious than before, less than twenty years later.

When the Handura chased down the Warring Hands, they expected it to be a brief slaughter before they turned southwest to engage with the larger but weaker Akashic force.

It didn't happen that way.

The Mysterious Conjunction

The Warring Hands reached the Darwushim no more than two hours before the Handura arrived on the scene. Making the most of their time, the two hunted factions met and conversed, even as the eccentric dervishes of the Darwushim whirled their way to ecstasy.

A number of Akashic Brothers, not content only to watch the dancing, began to move in the precise martial patterns of Do, demonstrating their own mystic and meditative techniques. The Darwushim were delighted at the spirit of reciprocity shown by the Akashics and fascinated by their disciplined and lethal grace.

Dervish after dervish stood and began spinning, the hems of their white robes fanning out hypnotically like the spinning of a prayer wheel. More Akashics rose in turn and began demonstrating the crisp meditative techniques of Do.

Within moments, pairs consisting of one dervish and one Akashic Brother covered the plain as the two sects of magical refugees began their great dance of order and ecstasy. When observed from above, the pattern created by the serenely spinning dervishes and sharply controlled Akashics made a mandala of white (the color of the dervishes' garments) and orange (the color of the Akashic's garb) on a green background. It



Those Involved

The Warring Hands

A ragtag troop of fighting men and battle-seasoned Akashic warriors, the Warring Hands had narrowly escaped the Handura throng that was close behind them when they came upon the whirling Darwushim.

The Warring Hands listened to the Khwaja al-Akbar's *wahdat al-wujud* or "Doctrine of Unity" and then joined physically with the Darwushim. There is no record of them after that night.

The Handura

Early Thanatoic magi, the Handura had been a gentle, if coarse, band of fortunetellers before the Himalayan Wars. By the time of the Night of Fana, they had become bloodthirsty swordsmen and wielders of devastating death magic.

The horde of sunken-eyed Handura horsemen were closing in on the Warring Hands at the moment the Khwaja al-Akbar revealed itself.

After the creation and disappearance of the Ahl-i-Batin, the battle-fatigued Handura clashed with the Celestial Singers, and were wiped out to the man.

The Darwushim

The historians of the Council of Nine commonly assume the Darwushim to be an early offshoot of the Cult of Ecstasy because of the techniques they used to achieve the state of *ihram*, a purified state of being that facilitates mystic consciousness. The Darwushim themselves disagree, claiming to be an *extremely* distant — heretical, some have claimed — offshoot of the Celestial Chorus. The Choristers themselves remain silent on the subject.

What the Darwushim were doing that night in that vast green meadow in Afghanistan is unknown. What *is* known is that they were dancing and whirling with a frenetic intensity. They were certainly performing magic, but to what end no one is sure.

During the Night of Fana, the Darwushim were incorporated, in all the senses of that word, into the Ahl-i-Batin.

The Celestial Singers

Latecomers to the evening's frenzy of violence, the Celestial Singers missed the angelic presence of the Khwaja al-Akbar and the actual creation of the Ahl-i-Batin, but they played a major role nonetheless.

The fresh battle-host of Mithraic and Zoroastrian Celestial Choristers had intended to crush

the Darwushim, whom they considered intolerably heretical. Much to their disappointment, the Darwushim (as they knew them, anyway) were nowhere to be found. Their disappointment was not long-lived. Handura re-enforcements blanketed the horizon and the two groups clashed on the plain below, with the Celestial Singers notably weakened but victorious.

The Entelechy

The dance of the Darwushim and Akashics summoned from banishment a supremely ancient Spirit of Unity called the Entelechy (*Ihn Talaqin* in Arabic). The moment it physically manifested in their presence, the new, disunited world dissolved the Entelechy into hundreds of shards of spirit. The process of this Entity's dissolution was perceived by human minds as the Entity known as the Khwaja al-Akbar, and the shards of spirit into which it was broken became the Avatars of the Ahl-i-Batin.

The Khwaja al-Akbar is not the Entelechy but, rather, the physical manifestation of its extinction (*fana*) (i.e., a process appearing as an individual).

was that precise configuration of bodies, magic and souls that summoned the Khwaja al-Akbar.

Khwaja al-Akbar

The pair at the center of the mandala comprised two lame men. One had lost his left arm to disease; the other had lost his to a Handuran blade. Both somewhat off balance, they had to improvise their respective moves, innovating upon ancient patterns. At the culmination of the dance, the two looked up simultaneously. A flash of profound recognition passed between them, and they stepped forward as though to embrace. Upon touching, the two men fused into one Entity with a face on the front and the back of its head. This was The-Entity-That-Is-Neither-One-Nor-The-Other. This was the Process of the Entelechy's Passing Away (*fana*) embodied.

This was the Khwaja al-Akbar.

As the Darwushim and Warring Hands continued to dance the mandala around the Conjoined Entity — seemingly unable to stop — the voice of the Unity, called Metatron by University of Light Kabbalists and called the Khwaja al-Akbar by the rest of the Batini, spoke to the assembled mages on the wide green expanse of grass and wildflowers. Both faces of the entity spoke, and stationary mages listening to one message were unable to hear the other, while mages in motion around the Khwaja al-Akbar heard bits of both speeches, and by that pastiche were they led to a higher awareness.

Once the Khwaja al-Akbar had spoken, space itself broke down. The land became like thick dough and the pairs of dancing mages stepped into each other. For a moment, the Khwaja al-Akbar existed on the field dozens of times over. All space was Unified. All minds were one.

And then the moment of *fana* had passed.

Where two had become one, one became two once more. However, the two who stepped away from the conjunction were not the same two who had joined. There were no Akashic Brothers and no Darwushim. The individuals standing on that field were holistic segments of the Unity they had been at the moments their minds fused. Their Avatars, too, had been touched, as shards of the Entelechy lodged in their souls at the moment of its passing away.

Those who remained were nameless (although they could remember being called by countless names), homeless (though they had memories of living in China, India, Persia and places even farther away) and without fear.

The unnamed formed a circle and stood there knowing each other and feeling the space that surrounded them.

When the Celestial singers appeared on the western horizon and the Handura barbarians appeared on the eastern horizon, the circle broke and the unnamed began dancing inward, until the circle formed a spiral. As each dancer reached the center of the spiral, he disappeared.

The two descending hordes began raining magics down on the dancers, but their Effects were wildly off. The Choristers' magics hit the Handura and vice versa. Each side was certain that the other was their prey's ally, and the magical battle erupted.

The last dancer reached the spiral's center and blinked out the moment the two hordes clashed in the center of the green field.

The Handura outnumbered their opponents almost two to one, but the Celestial Singers were more powerful magi by far and they were fresh to battle while the Handura had been fighting hard for weeks. The Singers summoned angels of fire and wrath to fight at their side, and the numbers grew closer to even.

The Handura manipulated the coincidences of the battle to devastating effect and laid curses on the Singers (and their Celestial allies) that took generations to run their course, and in the process cursed the valley itself, but in the end neither their magics nor their blades were enough to win them that battle. The Singers annihilated the Handura (and further devastated the valley) with blinding light and gouts of holy fire from above.

The Doctrine of Unity

I am the Khwaja al-Akbar, the Oracle of the Place Which is One, and My journeys among the world of men, so newly begun, are ended, and I am returned to myself. I bring to you, who have no more community of your own the wahdat al-wujud.

I was sent forth from the Power, and I have come to those who reflect upon me, and I have been found among those who seek after me.

Look upon me, you who reflect upon me and you hearers, hear me: Those of ye who are waiting for me, take me to your souls and do not banish me from your sight, nor, in any place or at any time, be ignorant of me.

For I am the First and the Last. I am the Honored One and the Scorned One. I am autochthonous but an alien to this place. I am the Barren One and My progeny are legion.

Be wary!

In a time before this time remembers, a great hero of Light slew a great beast of Chaos. When the thrashings of the beast were stilled, its carcass formed a great mountain that was called Qaf. This mountain, comprising everything and nothing, covered the world. The Champion cleared the world for the next Great Cycle and the coming of humanity.

Thus it was and shall ever be.

I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name.

I am the silence that is incomprehensible and the idea whose remembrance comes unbidden.

I am the voice whose echoes are manifold and the word whose sound is inescapable.

I am the very utterance of my name and by that utterance I am shattered and as I shatter, so do I lodge in your souls.

Be wary!

Through His primordial power the Champion carved Qaf into the shape of Enlightenment itself, with all forms of knowledge of the Unnameable, in all their diversity. The unknowing masses spanned the great mountain's base, and the mountain rose, and as the mountain rose its sides were more thinly populated. The mystics and philosophers were above the masses, and the magi were above the mystics and philosophers, and the Oracles were above the magi, and the Celestines were above the Oracles, and above the Celestines were the Presences, which are the Shadows of the Pure Ones. And at the Summit there is The Unity.

Thus it was and shall ever be.

Heed me, for I am knowledge and ignorance.

I am war, but so too am I peace.

I am chaos and I am order.

I am both boldness and shame.

I am strength and I am fear.

I am senseless and I am wise.

As I am compassionate, so am I cruel.

As I am called Law, so too is Lawlessness my name.

I began as one without. I have become as one within.

Be wary!

But as there is no great blessing without price, the blood of the Beast, seeped into the earth like roots growing from the mountain. The power of the lifeblood of the Beast saturated the Earth with pure and unstable primordial Essence.

Thus it was and shall ever be.

I am the one you have called and the one you have sundered.

Why do you curse me and honor me both?

I am unlearned and yet my knowledge flows unto you.

I am frenzy and I am self-control.

Hear me in gentleness and learn of me in violence.

I am cruelest war, yet peace comes because of me.

I am the judgement and the act of mercy.

I am focused and I am the untamed.

I am the union and the dissolution.

Know this: My terrible angels are one and omniscient.

Know this: My terrible angels are legion and inescapable.

Know this: My terrible angels are loosed.

Be wary!

It must be the task of the Enlightened to channel this raw power safely into the paths of Ascension, writing The Name of The Unity across the face of the World, before the mountain Itself is threatened.

Thus it is and ever must be.

Those who had walked to the spiral's center, however, had ceased to be involved with that conflict.

Those Who Went Inward resurfaced first in Persia, but over the space of a decade, settled in six schools, called *khanates*. The Interior Ones (*Ahl-i-Batin* in Arabic) soon insinuated themselves smoothly into the fabric of life in all the places they went. Their self-discipline, etiquette and subtlety granted them access to courts as viziers, astrologers, prophets and diplomats.

100 CE: Attempting to increase his understanding of the Qlippothic Spheres, the great Ahl-i-Batin scholar

(and murshid), Ishaq al-Jannani, deals with the *Nif' ur 'en Daah*, the Eaters of the Weak—later called the Nephandi—and turns barabbi. He changes his name to Ishaq al-Iblis and over the next decade becomes the first Devil King. (For more information on the Devil Kings and the Devil King age, see **Infernalism: The Path of Screams**, pp. 23, 96.) Iblisi targets his old Tradition for corruption and death. The *khanate* he leads, called the Oasis of Eternal Bliss, becomes a literal *jahannum* (or Hell on Earth) as the initiates and murids either enter the Cauls or get raped, tortured, skinned and ritually sacrificed. In response, the Ahl-i-Batin become avowed (and aggressive) enemies of the Nephandi and their infernal ilk.

109 CE: As a means of preventing the fall of any other *khanates*, the Ahl-i-Batin create the position of Qutb to connect the minds of the murids and carefully monitor them for corruption. The Qutb has little other power, but in time the number of Qutbs grows and their power does as well.

154 CE: The first Ahl-i-Batin assassins are trained as weapons against the Nephandi.

307 CE: A murshid visiting Cairo acquires an ancient papyrus manuscript on certain transformative arts of the Black Land of Khem (i.e., Egypt). Taking the manuscript back to Samarkand, the Batini introduces the study of the arts of al-Khem (which come to be known in the fullness of time as alchemy.)

610 CE: *Islam*

The Batini's greatest success with political control in the Middle East (and some say greatest failure as well) was the establishment of Islam. For over a thousand years since the Night of Fana, the Batini worked to bring order, culture and science to the nomadic Bedouin peoples of Arabia, but without a solid central ideal for the Arabs to rally around, factionalism eclipsed reason and ignorance prevailed.

As the Batini tell it, they built the foundation of Islam themselves. Whether the religion really owes its birth to the Ahl-i-Batin, or whether it was inspired by something else, remains a spate of conjecture. Ironically, the Batini who follow the tenets of Islam find no contradiction between inspiration via their heritage and the supposed divine mandate of the religion. The story according to the Batini goes something like this....

A man was born in the Arabian city of Yatrib in 575 who was to become the most powerful agent in all of the Ahl-i-Batin's history. His name was Muhammad ibn Abdallah and he was the scion of a minor trade family. In 610, one of the Qutbs of the Paradise Garden took notice of Muhammad's remarkable charisma and depth of feeling. Expecting to see an Awakened (or Awakening) Avatar, the Qutb, Wali al-Din, looked deep into ibn Abdallah's being. There was no strong Avatar there to Awaken, but the man had a grand destiny.

Al-Din spoke with the other Qutbs, and a decision was made: This man would be the Ahl-i-Batin's agent for bringing Unity to the world.

The combined minds of the Batini Qutbs entered ibn Abdallah's consciousness saying, "Recite!"

Ibn Abdallah looked around, and seeing no one became afraid, and he said, "I am unable to recite."

The collected Qutbs filled ibn Abdallah's mind with images, knowledge and a deep understanding of the Unity and again said, "Recite!"

Again ibn Abdalla said, "I am unable to recite!"

Again the Qutbs flooded the man's mind with all that they could of the Unity and its necessary place in the world, and then they said, "Recite!

Ibn Abdallah was reeling from the pressure that had built up in his brain. Any more information and he feared his head would explode. To save himself from another surge of information he said, "What shall I recite?"

And the Qutbs said, "Recite all that we have shown you."

And he did. Page after page of metaphysics, taboos, praise for the Unity and warnings about djinn poured out of him. This collection of knowledge he called "Recitations," the Arabic word for which is *qur'an*.

The Qutbs fed Muhammad ibn Abdallah information for the next twenty years, and he became known as a poet and a prophet. The Kahin of the Taftâni thought he was one of theirs, but the monotheistic nature of the man's words convinced them otherwise.

The essence of Muhammad ibn Abdallah's recitations was the necessity of surrendering to the Unity for the greater good of all. The new religion that came from these recitations was called Submission (or *Islam*, in Arabic), and one who had surrendered was called a *Muslim*.

The Qutbs were not entirely pleased with the results of their "visitation." Ibn Abdallah had filtered what they had shown him through a distorting lens of his own experience and incorporated concepts from other religions like Judaism and Christianity into his recitations. Overall, though, the Qutbs found it workable.

Even after Muhammad began spreading his religion of submission to the Unity throughout Arabia, the desert nomads (inspired by the pantheistic Taftâni) resisted accepting the new religion, except in the most nominal ways when it served their own purposes.

The Ahl-i-Batin, therefore, instituted a campaign of mentally "nudging" the Bedouin's tribal Paganism toward extinction. In relatively short order (less than two hundred years), the old religions had collapsed and in their absence Islam poured in to fill the void.

For nearly seven hundred years, the Qutbs steer Arabic culture with the rudder of Islam, bringing a golden age to the Middle East. The time before Islam comes be to known as *al-Jahiliya*, "the age of ignorance."

622 CE: Based on their personal experiences in the fight against the Devil Kings, Abbah Rabbiniath and Frater Decimus of the University of Light write the *Sebil-el-Mafouh Whash*, the first in-depth examination of the Ahl-i-Najasa ("The Filthy Ones" or Nephandi) and the manual on how to combat infernalists. They catalogue the frequently unpleasant techniques involved in combating Nephandi and provide information that proves useful and important in the fight against infernalism for centuries to come. It is later translated into Latin and called the Malleus Nephandorum.

631 CE: The Ahl-i-Batin enlist the help of the flamboyant Taftâni as well as the armies assembled by the "prophet" Muhammad ibn Abdallah to destroy Al-Malek Al-Majun Ibn Iblis, last of the Devil Kings. The battle takes weeks, vast expanses of desert are blasted to smooth glass, but the oldest of the infernal cities (and fallen *khanate*), the Oasis of Eternal Bliss, is destroyed utterly.

1258 CE: Mongols invade and sack Baghdad. The Batini scholar Baha al-Din Zuhayr tries to at least mitigate the barbarians' destructive rampage, but his approach is *too* subtle. He is gutted and hung up for the scavenger birds. The Mongol invasion marks the end of the Arabic Golden Age.

1455 CE: Within a single year, the Falcons of Gabriel, a division of the Cabal of Pure Thought, backed by the innovations of the Artificers, attack two of the Ahl-i-Batin's more powerful Crays.

In the Persian court of Artaxerxes, where the Batini are very much in favor as *viziers*, scholars and civil engineers, the Falcons force Sleepers and Awakened alike to confess their sins and convert to Christianity — and then murder them. The Gabrielites subsequently burn the exquisitely ornate palace and grind to dust a great deal of the art and statuary, claiming the nude sculptures "were offensive to the eyes of God."

Pressing their attack, the rampaging Gabrielites enter the Canyon of Qu-Dali with a similar agenda. The Batini of Qu-Dali are not predominantly scholars, however, but assassins. The Falcons of Gabriel are decimated without ever seeing their enemy.

1466 CE: The Ahl-i-Batin become a founding faction of the Council of the Nine Traditions, taking the seat of Correspondence. A long period of slow diplomacy and levering ensues, as the Batini try to spread Unity through the council while retaining their close ties to their homeland and faith.

1819 CE: The Technocracy becomes aware of vast reserves of Quintessence in the Middle East and moves in to take possession of the natural Horizon Realm, Jebel Qaf. The Ahl-i-Batin, harkening back to the Doctrine of Unity, do everything in their power to keep the Technocracy away, including unleashing some Correspondence Effects that seriously warp space throughout Arabia and sever connections to several Horizon Realms. Both sides lose as Jebel Qaf is cut off from the world.

Kabbalists from the University of Light vow to send angels to seek the Great Mountain, but nothing further is heard.

1890-1914 CE: The Great War — The Technocratic Crackdown. Finally, vowing to return to guide their Tradition again at some point in the future, the remaining Qutbs discontinue their network of minds, leaving the Batini completely without leadership.

Taking advantage of the confusion among the stunned Ahl-i-Batin, the Technocracy wipes out *zawiya* after *zawiya*. Only a tremendous last-ditch campaign of misdirection tactics prevents the New World Order from discerning the location of the *khanates*. Whenever Technocratic enforcers get too close to the *khanates*, the Subtle Ones lure them into incredibly complex webs of intrigue that subtly point the Technocracy in the direction of the nearest Taftâni. The toll on the Taftâni is enormous, but the *khanates* remain uncompromised.

1904 CE: Influx of Technocrats into the Middle East devastates local Traditions and Crafts. The Paradigm remains flexible in some places, but ossifies in most others, particularly around cities. The Ahl-i-Batin fare notably better than the more blatant Weavers, but the Batini can no longer meddle in politics as blatantly as they once did, reducing their influence even more.

1910 CE: Henry Ford brings thousands of Arabs from several Middle East countries to Detroit to work in his automobile plants. Many Batini, wanting to "go underground," use this as their route to America, ironically escaping much of the Technocracy's pogrom in the Middle East.

1932 CE: The Break. Under extreme duress from the collapse of the Qutbs and feeling abandoned by the other eight Traditions, the Ahl-i-Batin cut their ties with the Council of Nine altogether, vowing to protect their homelands single-handedly.

1963 CE: A popular Islamic mystic living in Iran is arrested by the Technocracy. Instead of being neutralized or converted, the Ayatollah Khomenei is banished to Turkey where he loudly continues to challenge the Technocracy's authority.

1979 CE: The Reprieve. Technocratic influence in the Middle East hits a wall in 1979 when Islamic hardliners in Iran oust its puppet dictator, the Shah, in January. At the urging of the murshid of the Paradise Garden, the Ayatollah Khomenei returns from exile February first and assumes control of the country ten days later. Technocratic agents are purged from the country.

March to July, 1979 CE: A number of old Batini, including a handful of the Qutbs who escaped the Technocracy's assassination campaign almost half a century earlier, step out of *Ghayba* (Occultation) and resume orchestrating the Ahl-i-Batin's affairs.

In a bid to preserve the "Technocracy-free Zone," the Batini approach a handful of known Taftâni wizards at the prompting of the Qutbs and forge a temporary alliance. So long as the Weavers stay away from major population centers, they are granted free reign throughout Iran.

October, 1979 CE: The training of new Qutbs begins in Isfahan. Three Adepts of Mind begin rigorous study of the magical, moral, doctrinal and strategic skills necessary to guide their ailing Tradition.

November, 1979 CE: 63 hostages are taken from the American embassy in Tehran to protest Technocratic hegemony. The media spin it so that it looks like simple political terrorism.

Five months later, the alliance with the Weavers pays off. Technocratic forces are routed in an incursion attempt as they discover that the Technocratic paradigm has ceased to hold sway. Paradox in the Iranian desert knocks Technocracy helicopters out of the sky.

June, 1980 CE: The Paradise Garden in Isfahan assigns an assassin to the Shah of Iran to avenge the long-murdered Qutbs. A month later, the Shah is dead.

March, 1985 CE: Fatimah Abdari, the first new Qutb to complete training in over fifty years, assumes her role as one of the "saints" of the Ahl-i-Batin.

July, 1989 CE: The Ayatollah Khomenei dies. Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Khomenei, another staunch foe of the Technocracy, is given the nod by the Paradise Garden and becomes the mystical leader of Iran.

May 1997 CE: With no Technocratic influence whatsoever, the Iranian people elect Mohammed Khatami, a Technocratic sympathizer, to the position of President of Iran. While the real power still lies with the Ayatollah, the Ahl-i-Batin prepare to become subtle once more if and when the Technocracy resume power.

Geopolitics

The educational institutions of the Ahl-I-Batin are still based largely in the Middle East at the five *khanates*. Beyond that, the Subtle Ones cannot be said to be anywhere (or not be anywhere) in particular. In recent years, however, the Batini have spread throughout the world. *Jana'a* can be found on six of the seven continents (Antarctica holds only minimal appeal for them), and are well established in such diverse places as Turkey, Germany (thanks to the Turks), Spain, Greece, America (notably in Michigan around Detroit and in New Mexico), Brazil (in the south of the country), Morocco (especially Marrakesh) and Australia.

Batini can fit in anywhere. On the whole, they are accomplished linguists, cultural mimics and masters of etiquette (Mind magic helps a lot with that). The subtle ones didn't garner their reputation by standing out! Anyone who trains for even a brief period with the Batini probably learns at least a few different smatterings of language and cultural idiosyncrasies; the Batini magic of Occultation (see further in this chapter) only enhances this trend. While more established Traditions may have a laissez-faire attitude about such training, the Batini recognize the need to make sure that their apprentices can survive anywhere without drawing attention — so, unless you can, you're not a Batini.

The Ahl-i-Batin remain involved in the politics of their homelands, of course. Chances are, for any given politico at the local level of Saudi Arabia, Libya, Turkey, Qatar — just about any country there — a Batini network has *some* level of influence, and its agents report back to an Ahl-i-Batin *somewhere*. Indeed, some Batini make a hobby of seeing how far they can stretch their networks; it's not unusual for a Batini to hold some influence with the authorities of a locality hundreds of miles away. This only holds true among those who haven't yet become so Occulted as to prevent the actual exercise of influence, of course.

Once away from the Middle East, matters become a bit more complicated. Subtle Ones have cropped up across some parts of the US, various South American nations, much of Africa and the Far East. Actual chantries, fortifications or flophouses remain rare outside the Middle East; they draw too much attention and, often, there aren't enough Batini to make them worthwhile. Still, rumor holds that the Akashic Brotherhood shelters Ahl-i-Batin who come through Osaka, Japan, and for some reason most Batini traveling through the United States pass through New Mexico at some point.

Beliefs: The Doctrine of Unity



The Doctrine of Unity pushes the abt toward monotheism, which they consider a pure belief compared to the hodgepodge of polytheistic or theosophic constructs. "After all," opined one Batini philosopher, "a man who serves many masters cannot answer to all of them at once."

Creation

Batini theories on the beginning of existence sometimes bog down into debate over hair-splitting — none too surprising where theology's involved. As the Batini often claim credit for the foundation of Islam, their standing as practitioners of said religion seems a bit quirky: How can you serve a religion that you created whole cloth? For their part many Batini argue that they merely gave the inspiration; Allah was always there, simply waiting for the conduit to bring His will to light.

Batini creation philosophy thus combines their mystical underpinnings with their religion. Allah is the true form of Unity. As all of the cosmos is part of His design, the whole of reality and consciousness is united as an extension of His form.

Of course, not all Batini are strictly religious, and even those who devoutly hold to the vision of Allah as the central Unity of the Tellurian still admit plenty of room for metaphor. Unlike the Celestial Chorus, where tiny dogmatic details become the crux of heated debate and even internecine strife, the Batini embrace diversity in the cause of Unity. Very few Batini have narrow or reactionary convictions; instead, Batini see the questions of faith — did creation literally occur in days, or is that metaphor? Do spirits have a role under heaven, or are they manifestations of the adversary? — as riddles and puzzles to explore. In doing so they do not cling to the notion that one theory must be "right," but rather that the exercise of exploration is, itself, a profound and holy act. Because of this, Batini easily agree to disagree in matters of profundity, since they do not become wed to any single vision as a dogmatic truth.

Naturally, the Batini have many conflicting views on the "truth" of creation. Most Batini agree that the Tellurian formed at the will of Allah, the Unity of the Tapestry. Indeed, the power to change the Tapestry through will serves as further proof of humanity's closeness to Allah. However, no Batini has yet found the magic that will scry past the barriers of ages. When was the universe created? Why? Were humans a pinnacle of creation or an afterthought? Did Patterns arise from human inspection of the Tellurian, or did they always exist independent of the human mind? These questions, to the Batini, have no concrete answers.

Materialism — or Lack Thereof

Wanderers, beggars and ascetics, the Ahl-i-Batin have no great love of possessions. The Tariqa — the Batini way — advocates a strict code of self-mastery, self-reliance and rigorous mental and physical training. Anything that detracts from that is considered at least decadent and probably dangerous. At its most extreme, Batini asceticism eschews ownership of anything except for the clothes the mage is wearing; all else is frivolity.

An unmoving dervish will not experience ecstasy while one who whirls will attain great understanding; likewise, a Subtle One who gets weighed down by physical possessions becomes inflexible and weak, while one who owns little remains capable of moving in whichever way life demands of her. One with nothing has the potential to have everything while possessions breed inflexibility and weakness.

A life of *zuhd*, or extreme asceticism, is the best possible preparation for those Batini who undergo the Ritual of Occultation. Occultation is like the most extreme asceticism possible taken to a whole new order of magnitude.

Health and Wellness

The Ahl-i-Batin, particularly those from the Ikhwan at-Tawhid, follow a strict path of strenuous physical training. They are instructed to remain attentive to subtle changes or signs of illness in their bodies, and to deal with any form of weakness or infirmity before it becomes problematic. Those using the Life Sphere are especially adept at this and maintain their bodies at the level of an Olympic athlete through extensive training and subtle Life Effects.

Likewise, the Subtle Ones adhere to a rigorous and uncompromising program of mental training that includes thought exercises, didactic riddles and psychic defense skills. Also included in this training is a strict program of emotional hygiene that gives the Batini necessary skills for warding off unhealthy thoughts, feelings or impulses.

Part of the reason for the intense training in both areas is that the Batini don't acknowledge a distinction between mind and body. To the Ahl-i-Batin, the self is



a singular entity with many intimately connected facets. Pretending that "mind," "body" and "soul" are discrete phenomena leads to a muddy understanding of the self and limits its potential.

Overall, the Batini approach to health is extremely effective at preventing physical, mental or emotional imbalance. Not only do they easily avoid the illness and imbalance that come with weakness and lack of clarity, but also they cultivate a very high level of health that allows them to function well beyond the levels attainable by the untrained.

In particular, the Batini combine a constant series of exercise with magical insight. Batini often indulge in travel, labor and craftsmanship without any helpful tools or vehicles, both as a form of asceticism and as exercise. The Batini focus on riddles, labyrinths and puzzles keeps their minds keen. This isn't so much a deliberate "exercise for the sake of exercise" as it is a by-product of what is essentially a strengthening lifestyle. Many Batini would consider exercise machines and repetitive aerobic programs rather absurd—better to do something that serves a practical use in addition to strengthening the body.

Ascension

Despite Batini philosophies on unity, occultation and the connection of all things, Ascension remains a lofty and intangible goal. During their heyday the Batini admitted to the Council that they really had no more practical experience with the Ascension process than any other group — that is, while Ascension remains a spoken goal, nobody's ever met an Ascended being or seen the actual process. Of course, for the Batini, this means little: Given Batini skills in occultation, it's quite possible that those who Ascend only step from the ranks of those who're totally removed from any connection with history!

Unity

So what *is* the Batini view of Ascension? In a word, their much-vaunted Unity. The Batini see the Ascension process as a means of coming in touch with the whole of the Tellurian; in fact, a properly Ascended being is, to the Batini, no different than the Tellurian itself. Naturally this philosophy has elements in common with the Akashic Brotherhood's view of reality as illusion and with the Celestial Chorus' search for divinity. The rites of occultation firmly ground this Unity; in effect, the Tellurian itself "forgets" that there's any difference between the Batini and itself.

To the end of Ascension through Unity, the Batini help to bring connections between people, places and most importantly ideas. It was a Batini web of influence that brought the fledgling Traditions grudgingly together in the early Renaissance. The Batini hope that

eventually people can be taught to realize that all things spring from the same place and that differences are ultimately arbitrary. Naturally, such insights do not come easily or quickly. For this reason among others the Batini keep a closeted Tradition. While this may seem contradictory at first — why have a secretive, hidden group when one espouses that differences and disagreements are just misunderstanding of reality? — the Batini also note that disunity leads to an opposite spectrum from Ascension. Those who aren't ready to embrace Unity and diversity must be carefully guided to new understandings lest too much disharmony lead to argument, violence and even greater disunity. To this end, the Batini plant their subtle seeds among many organizations, regardless of goals or lines. Politicians find common cause with academic or religious interests; arts cross cultural and economic barriers; different specialized careers work together to form a larger finished product. The Batini encourage and foster such cross-pollinating relationships, which also happens to be good practice for making allies that advance Batini agendas.

On a personal level, Batini learn to see through artificial divisions and to foster compromise and new ways of looking at things. Diplomacy plays part and parcel in this training, but many Batini aren't above stooping to a little blackmail. This can be as overt as a sit-down set of talks between two disagreeing parties or as subtle as leaving hidden cues (perhaps with some judicious Mind magic) to encourage people to think in new directions about their adversaries.

Once the world's no longer fighting against itself — once all elements of the Tellurian realize their essential Unity — the Batini will have completed their work.

(Noteworthy is the fact that, despite Batini ideas of unification, they're just as human as anyone else. Batini can and do become offended or incensed at a wide variety of stimuli. Some Batini hate the Technocracy; others are bitter about the Traditions; some have political or religious agendas. Hobbies and personal history don't prohibit a Batini from having likes and dislikes. The important goal is the larger view of Unity. Once endemic problems like injustice, inequity and warfare are solved, *then* there's room to tackle the smaller bits.)

Other Entities

Traditions

There was a time when we respected the Tradition Council, and it seemed as though Unity were served by our working together. Then we discovered how weak of character most Traditionalists are. We were slow to reveal ourselves to them, and rightly so. We realized decades ago that we had enough to worry about without having so-called allies like the Traditions disappoint and time after time, and in response we disappeared and attended to the Ascension war in our own region of the world. Now there are more Ahl-i-Batin than there have been in two hundred years, and we are subtler than ever before. Now that we are becoming stronger once more in accordance with the Prophecy of the Phoenix, perhaps we need to show them what kind of discipline it takes to defeat an enemy without ever meeting them in open conflict.

Taftâni

They may not appreciate our subtlety, and we may find them deeply offensive, but we have a deep respect for their... determination. If we are to free our shared homelands from Technocratic hegemony, we must do it together. Without real, effective unity, doctrinal Unity is moot.

Technocracy

Until recently, we were able to look upon what they'd done with a certain degree of respect, if not appreciation. They are skilled, persuasive and work toward a goal that's only a little misguided. But they are all dogma and no mysticism. The world they advocate is no more viable than a body without a heart, and, let there be no doubt, we resent their self-righteous crusade deeply. We do not need self-appointed guardians of reality dictating which kinds of magic are and are not acceptable.

In recent years, as their conflict with the Traditions has become more a mop-up operation than a war, they have redoubled their efforts to eradicate the Disparates, and with relative success. They have struck at us on every front: They swarmed over our homelands like maggots on a dead camel, they severed our connection to Jebel Qaf, they assassinated the *qutbs* who orchestrated our glorious network of minds and they hunted down every Batini they could find.

Even so, they have not taken as much notice of us as we have of them. They cannot eradicate what they cannot sense, and now that we are linked once more through the *Qutbs*, we are able to function once more with discipline and cohesion. Our strikes against them are proving unexpectedly successful, but they may as well be kicking sand dunes for all the effect their recent attacks have had on us.

And now is our time for vengeance, and there is no enemy more dangerous than the one you cannot see.

Nephandi

Destroyers, liars, corrupters, vermin and filth without exception. We can at least bear the Technocracy a grudging respect. The Nephandi, our oldest and most hated adversaries, have given the world nothing but pain, terror and sickness. They wreck and defile every sacred work even as we strive to spread the Doctrine of Unity to a broken world.

Worst of all, thanks to our own damnable *barabbi*, they know our strategies and use them against us to great effect. The very same tactics of subtlety, misdirection and stealth that allow us to survive in the face of the Technocracy's pogrom are used against us by the Ahl-i-Najasa — the Filthy Ones.

The Technocracy hasn't done one quarter the damage to our cause that the Nephandi have, starting with that thrice-cursed perfidious dog, Ishaq al-Iblis.

We have had enough of their corruption, their Devil Kings, their monstrosities, their violent perversions and their heresy. We have knowledge of the Nephandi that the other Traditions do not — may the Unity forgive us — and once we are not so pressed by the Technocracy's attack dogs, we will show the Filthy Ones the full extent of our wrath. In the interim, we must be content with pitting those two enemies against each another. Watching them eat away at each other like rabid dogs in a cage will keep us contented — for now.

Marauders

Madmen and disorderers all, the Marauders are nothing but the irrational lapdogs of *isfret*. While their attacks on us are sporadic and only moderately effective, they are no less dangerous to humanity than the Nephandi or the djinn. They take their great gift and abuse it blasphemously. We are thankful that the Web of Faith has kept them effectively barred from our primary homelands. In this dark age, that is the only respite we can take comfort in.

Djinn

There is only one safe way to interact with the djinn, and that is to avoid them. Their lies and depredation have been taking their toll on the human race for millennia now, and that toll would have been far worse were it not for the knowledge passed down to us, the Taftâni and the Hermetics by Solomon.

The djinn are knowledgeable and dangerous in the extreme. They are older than humanity and their bitterness at our race lurks behind their every interaction with us. Yes, the human race displaced the djinn in the material world. Yes they are inherently more noble, more civilized and more powerful. Yes, it's a travesty. But there comes a time, dear Spirit, to just get over it.

Vaitipires

The *ghuls*, the *hajjaj*, they too are subtle ones. They are not all of a type. Some we have dealt with for centuries, and from these we have learned wondrous things. Some small few of them make passable allies, though such practices are rash, and I would urge you strongly to have miracles at the ready just in case your ally turns on you.

Others, however, are as bad as demons or djinn and cannot be persuaded to think of human kind as anything but cattle. These should be destroyed

Changers

Maintain your subtlety and secrecy around the changers. The ravens are only too willing to search out our secrets and compromise our secrecy. Some of the cats are at least moderately civilized. The wolves, on the other hand, are extremely dangerous, but, as with so many of our enemies, they have to see us before they can attack. If they come looking for you it's best just to misguide them, and send them at your own foes.

Hunters

They do not know all they believe they know, and that is probably for the best. If they come looking for Persian sorcerers, they'll find the Taftâni long before they even hear whispers of our existence; subsequently, there will be some screaming, probably, a little fire and, at the end, a bit of smoke rising from the horizon. The drifting sand will cover over any ugly remnants, and that will be that. Security is one of the many privileges of subtlety.

The Athenti

We have been aware of the existence of the Egyptian Immortals almost from our inception, but these new children of eternity appear to be quite a radical departure from the old-souled companions of the Avenger. They appear to be adherents of the Doctrine of Unity, though they don't seem to know it by that name. Were it any other way, we would be forced to deal with them most harshly because, whatever they are, these immortal children are associated with the great disruption in the Web of Faith, one of the last remaining accomplishments of our Tradition that hasn't been undone by the Technocracy or the Nephandi. Given that they seem to be on our side, maybe they're a sign of the eternal benevolence of the Unity.

Organization

The Subtle Ones are staunch advocates of formal organization. Without organization there can be no acknowledgement of the Unity.

During training, young Ahl-i-Batin initiates learn the tarika at the Tradition's five *khanates*. Once an initiate or *mutasawwif* masters the tarika, he undergoes whatever initiation is appropriate for his *khanate* and is thereafter considered a murid, a fully acknowledged member of his Tradition.

Once a murid learns the more esoteric elements of the Batini worldview, including the more complex issues in the study of space and how it can be shaped subjectively, he is given formal testing by the Qutbs. During his initiation, a murshid must demonstrate his deep understanding of sacred geometry, higher mathematics and the relationship of those two subjects to the Unity.

Murshids are extremely rare in the modern world; many were assassinated by the Technocracy in the early part of the 20th century. The majority of those who survived the purge underwent the Ritual of Occultation and became un-findable, even by the Correspondence Masters of their own Tradition.

In last two decades, some of the old Murshids have made appearances at the *khanates* again, and a number of murids proved their knowledge of Batini doctrine and became murshids themselves.

Once initiates pass their initiation they leave the *khanates*, until they believe they are ready for their initiation to Murshid status.

After leaving the *khanates*, the Ahl-i-Batin gather in lodges called *zawiyas*. A zawiya typically houses three to eight Batini leading somewhat monastic lives of discipline and scholarship. The group of Batini living in a *zawiya* is called a *jama'a* or "community." Sometimes a *jama'a* will be made up of a number consors as well as mages in which case the *jama'a* may consist of up to ten individuals. The head of the *jama'a*, called the *imam*, is whichever mage is the most knowledgeable in Ahl-i-Batin doctrine.

A *jama'a* typically does not pursue the business of the Ahl-i-Batin Tradition as a whole unless directed to do so by a *Qutb*. The relationship between one *jama'a* and another is very like the relationship between two cells of undercover agents, which is to say, there is none. Outside of the *khanates*, Batini are not supposed to know each other. This has two effects: it strengthens the bond between the members of a particular *jama'a*, and protects Batini secrecy. Unfortunately, when there are no Qutbs to act as moral compasses for the Batini, this same degree of secrecy makes a *jama'a* easy prey for Nephandic infiltrators.

Since the return of the Qutbs, no fewer than three Batini *jama'a* were discovered to have been completely subverted by *barabbi*. Once the *Qutbs* ascertained the facts of the situation, *khilwati* were sent in to address the problem.

The structure of the *zawiya* itself is typically built in strict accordance with the principles of sacred geometry and features a dome, high ceilings and various repeating architectural motifs representing the levels of the slopes of Jebel Qaf on the way to Unity.

Tutelage

Two types of people are chosen to undergo initiation into the Ahl-i-Batin: those whose unAwakened Avatars were originally fragments of the Entelechy and those whose unAwakened Avatars could be "tuned" to that metaphysical form.

A handful of murshids within the Tradition take on the primary role of monitoring unusually talented young candidates over the course of many years for hints of the right kind of Avatar. Those candidates who are bright, driven and show a deep interest in metaphysics, mathematics, architecture, chemistry and similar disciplines are discreetly tested for subtlety, stability and insight. If the candidate meets these requirements and the murshid is satisfied that a potential candidate is a low security risk and more than eighty percent likely to agree to an offer to join the Ahl-i-Batin, he sends a murid to make the initial contact.

The murid is typically around the candidate's age, if possible. The murid befriends the candidate (with the assistance of Mind magic if necessary), and after a number of friendly meetings, takes him to a sanctum maintained for just such a purpose and show him some small act of magic. The murid immediately extends the candidate an offer to study at one of the five *khanates* and become a part of the Ahl-i-Batin. The mage closely monitors the candidate's response with Mind magic. If there is any problem (though after this much pre-screening, there rarely is), or if the candidate declines the offer, the mage will erase all memory of the murid, implant some suggestions in the candidate's mind ("I wish I could do magic" and "I wish I could read minds" are common ones), and sends the candidate home. Typically, the murid makes another attempt in a few months, after the suggestions have had time to properly germinate.

If the candidate agrees, the murid places some mental blocks in the candidate's mind to keep him from discussing his experience with others and gives the candidate time to wrap up his worldly affairs before

traveling with the murid to whichever *khanate* the candidate shows the most interest in.

It sometimes comes to pass that individuals Awaken on their own with strong Entelechy-type Avatars. Almost invariably the young mage's Avatar will engineer circumstances such that he finds his way to one of the *khanates* on his own (Unity-attuned Avatars, after all, have a very strong connection to other Unity-attuned Avatars).

The first stage of training, lasting about a year, introduces the initiate to the basic concepts of Batini life, and incorporates his indoctrination into the tariqa, the Batini way of doing things. Initiates learn the Doctrine of Unity and a myriad of non-magical persuasion and stealth techniques. Over the first year, the *mutasawwif* also becomes acquainted with the ascetic nature of Batini life. The techniques of self-mastery are not easy; Westerners, in particular, are so steeped in their culture of comfort and decadence that *zuhd* initially feels to them more like a punitive gesture than a path to freedom and enlightenment.

Once the *mutasawwif* has made it through the first year, she is no longer considered an initiate, but a murid, and she begins learning the Principles of Unity that grant understanding into the Sphere of Correspondence. Depending on which *khanate* she is studying at, she will also focus on one or two other Spheres as well, in addition to her particular *khanate's* required physical and mental training.

Internal Politics

The Ahl-i-Batin drive toward self-mastery keeps politics to an absolute minimum. Unlike certain other Traditions where ego and grandstanding are the norm, there is no room in the Batini's world for that sort of melodramatic behavior.

Intra-Tradition conflict within the Ahl-i-Batin is handled through cold, well-reasoned discourse. Batini conflict-resolution combines the skilled legal wrangling of an attorney, the intimidating interpersonal insight of a psychological warfare expert and the icy self-control of a hit man.

At the top of the Batini hierarchy are the Qutbs, the spiritual, legal and mystical leaders of the Tradition.

Below the Qutbs are the Murshids, those Batini who have been indoctrinated into the deeper secrets of the Doctrine of Unity (and who, in game terms, have attained the fourth Rank in a Sphere).

Below the Murshids are the Murids. The *zawiyh* are made up of a number of murids led by an imam. Below the Murids are the *mutasawwifs*, or initiates, with an Arete no higher than one.

Isn't That Brainwashing?

The Subtle Ones use an array of persuasion and indoctrination techniques on candidates and initiates that are at least somewhat augmented with Mind magic. To an outside observer, it may appear that the Batini are brainwashing their new recruits. This is not the case.

Free will is an inherent part of the Batini concept of a healthy and self-reliant individual, and they avoid direct "brainwashing" techniques (on their own members, anyway) in all but the most extreme circumstances.

That said, the Ahl-i-Batin are keenly aware that certain parts of the training process are simply more difficult than others and may require more finesse to help the *mutasawwif* through the transition from unfocused, confused and harried neophyte to highly disciplined Ahl-i-Batin mage. During these critical periods, the presiding murid will take the liberty of mitigating the initiate's more angry, resentful or depressive feelings and enhancing feelings of accomplishment and camaraderie. Murids do this only during the first year of training, however, because after that time, the initiate's understanding of Mind magic and mental defense is sufficiently advanced that he can sense, and possibly prevent, the murid's tampering.

The difference between brainwashing and the Batini approach to facilitating enlightenment is one of several orders of magnitude. The former is more like administering a shot of heroin to quiet a whiny patient whereas the latter is more akin to administering an aspirin for an athlete's sore muscles.

While the Batini may evince a certain Machiavellian edge from time to time, they are not a cult, and they have no intention of undermining the moral integrity of their own Tradition with cheap brainwashing techniques.

The down side to the highly orderly (some say cold) nature of Ahl-i-Batin culture, however, is that there is not a great deal of innovation within its ranks because the control of the Qutbs is largely absolute. Disagreeing with a Qutb, while allowed, is considered somewhat scandalous, and not something anyone below murshid level will want to do unless he has some sort of significant advantage.

Batini Justice

Justice among the Batini is given a great deal of importance — the concept of justice, the fair and impartial judgment of all sides of a conflict, is paramount in the pursuit of Unity. The Qutbs must memorize by heart centuries of Ahl-i-Batin doctrine, jurisprudence and commentary on those two areas. The Qutbs are rigorously tested for moral, ethical and judicial fitness to their position and have a respectable history of being wise and impartial judges.

With one exception, banishment, reinforced by potent mental blocks, is the sternest sentence imposed by Qutbs. Given their mastery of Mind and Correspondence, they have no difficulty making sure that the banished mage stays banished. Qutbs pass a sentence of death by silence (assassination) on any Batini found to have become barabbi, but three Qutbs must all confirm that the mage in question has gone to the Cauls and been corrupted. Simple interest in Qlippothic Spheres or the like, while cause for concern and, probably, close monitoring, is not a capital offense.

Conflicts between members of the Tradition are adjudicated by a Qutb who looks into the mind of the concerned parties, discerns who was wronged and makes a ruling. Any sort of violent conflict resolution (like dueling, including certamen), between mages is strictly prohibited and punished by banishment together to an unusually harsh setting (Montreal and New York are popular) where they will be forced to get along or perish.

Factions

There are five schools of philosophy, or *khanates*, among the Ahl-i-Batin.

There is very little factionalism among the Ahl-i-Batin. While the five *khanates* all have very different mystical and philosophical emphases, all members of the Tradition identify first and foremost as Ahl-i-Batin and then only secondarily, if at all, as a student of a particular *khanate*. As the Murshids teach, "The fingers are all different, but only a fool would say that they were not part of the same hand or that the hand was not, in turn, a part of the larger whole of the body. The thumb and the four fingers are all integral and indispensable parts of the hand, and competition among them can have no constructive outcome." From this metaphor comes the Batini's term for its own structure: the Hand of Unity.

University of Light

Of the five *khanates*, the University of Light, in Jerusalem, is the least paranoid, but the most insular of the *khanates*. Its dealings with the Spirit world are kept under tight wraps, and students learn the basics of summoning, binding, warding and assorted Spirit dealings in extremely heavily warded rooms in sub-basements of the khanate's building.

The large estate legally changes hands from one Subtle individual to another every ten to twenty years to keep up appearances, but it has been carrying out the task of training the Ahl-i-Batin's Kabbalists and Spiritualists since shortly after the Tradition was founded.

The Murshid overseeing the University of Light is among the oldest surviving Batini. Miriam ben-Hamida has survived Nephandic infiltration, Technocratic pogroms and the darkest hours of her Tradition (widely agreed upon as being the first half of the twentieth century), yet she remains a canny and charming woman thought to be approaching Archmage status in the Spirit Sphere.

Ben-Hamida watches over the training of young Ahl-i-Batin Kabbalists very closely. She is known for her extreme rigor, and it's not unheard of for initiates to leave the University of Light to study at an easier *khanate*. That would be any of the other four.

The library of the University of Light is held in an enormous underground room with no doors. It contains some of the most rare Kabbalistic documents in existence, including several unique original texts (like the *Sefer Nitsotsoth*, "the Book of Sparks") that the murids have arduously hand-copied for years so that the knowledge might never be lost.

Ironically, more than half of the students at the University of Light are women. While the standard rule in Judaism holds that women should not study Kabbalah, given that one of the most important elements of the Sefiritic Tree is Malkuth, the female aspect of the Unity, the Ahl-i-Batin find a certain poetic element in training female Kabbalists. Many of the University of Light's female initiates were also drawn to that *khanate* by the fact that its focus was less active and far less martial than the other *khanates*.

Stamina is the Attribute most tested here. The physical techniques taught at the University of Light are infinitely more subtle than dancing or fighting, focusing instead on careful creation and recreation of Arabic and Hebrew calligraphy, painstaking hand-copying of old Kabbalistic texts and the precise creation of summoning, binding and warding circles, symbols and glyphs.

More varied are the mental techniques taught to initiates: Persuasion techniques backed up by the Mind Sphere; Bargaining, particularly as it is used with djinn; the

Ahl-i-Batin and the Kabbalah

The Kabbalah is a system of mysticism uncovered by Jewish scholars and holy men that aspires to explain the underlying pattern of the Tellurian and the holy and unholy forces that shape the world.

In the World of Darkness, the three groups that make the most use of Kabbalah are the Lions of Zion, the Ahl-i-Batin and the Order of Hermes.

Gematria is the Kabbalistic study of numerology. In the Hebrew alphabet, every letter has a numerical correspondence, and gematria is the study of the numerological meanings of words.

Most Kabbalists focus on the Holy Sefiroth, the ten Lights or primal numbers out of which all of the Tellurian evolved. Each Sefira also represents one aspect of the Unity that, while hidden, seeks to be known and made manifest.

The metaphysicists of the Ahl-i-Batin have compiled enormous amounts of writing on the interactions between the Sefiroth, as well as the angels, Spirits and magical Sphere associated with each Sefira.

For complex metaphysical reasons, the Sefiritic Tree — sometimes called the World Tree — grows upside down. The topmost Sefiroth are the roots and compose the realm of the intellect — Keter (Will), Hokmah (Wisdom) and Binah (Insight).

In the middle of the tree are the extremes and the place where extremes are reconciled: Hesed (Grace), Gevurah (Punishment) and Tifereth (Mercy).

The last three Sefiroth are Netsah (Endurance), Hod (Radiance) and Yesod (Foundation).

These nine Sefiroth are granted access to the world through the creative female principle called Malkuth or the Shekinah, which gives birth to them all.

The Kabbalists of the University of Light have established correspondences between the Sefiroth and the Spheres of magic, and many of the Ahl-i-Batin's more complicated conjunctional Effects have their roots in metaphysical experimentation stemming from the Sefiritic view of the nine Spheres.

Mind — Keter (Will)
Prime — Hokmah (Wisdom)
Correspondence — Binah (Insight)
Spirit — Hesed (Grace)
Entropy — Gevurah (Punishment)
Life — Tifereth (Mercy)
Time — Netsah (Endurance)
Forces — Hod (Radiance)
Matter — Yesod (Foundation)
Unity — Malkuth: the pinnacle of Jebel Qaf, from which the other nine Sefira flow, like rivers from a mountain spring.

Each Sefirah also has a corresponding husk or dark reflection, which captures the dark elements of that facet of the Unity. These dark reflections are called the Qlippoth, and the corrupted Spheres used by the Nephandi are therefore called the Qlippothic Spheres.

study of appropriate Spirit etiquette for use with the more powerful and abstract entities of the Umbra, and whole shelves of scrolls and books on how to recognize the different celestial, infernal and Invisible World entities.

The Silk Cartel

The smallest of the five *khanates*, the Silk Cartel is made up largely of alchemists and conjurers.

The physical techniques taught at this khanate are largely associated with sacred geometry. Initiates and murids build labyrinths, pyramids, ziggurats (as means of evoking the lost Jebel Qaf) and gardens. The mental techniques taught are largely of the self-transformative variety.

Most of the approaches to magic here use outmoded foci, which is one of the reasons it draws fewer initiates than other *khanates*. The Silk Cartel lacks the rugged appeal of the Ikhwan at-Tawhid, the glamour of the Paradise Garden or the erudition of the University of Light. Much of what the Batini learn at this *khanate* also borders on primitive Technocratic Procedures, which worries some of the other murshids, who believe the focus of this *khanate* needs to change significantly.

Members of the dwindling Silk Cartel place a high emphasis on mathematics, chemistry and alchemy. However, they see the works of labyrinths and potions as transformative metaphors. In traversing a maze, the postulant gains new knowledge both of the landscape and of the workings of his mind. In creating and purifying an elixir, the student learns of the nature of purification in ways that can reflect upon the self. Neither of these are particularly unique to the Batini — certainly other alchemical practitioners follow these routes, and the early days of the Order of Reason also encompassed such practices. The Silk Cartel keeps

The Kabbalist's Library

The mystical knowledge of the Kabbalists comes from old texts of Hebrew mysticism, a number of which, oddly, originated in Spain. Though there are hundreds if not thousands of Kabbalistic texts, the most important are listed here.

Sefer ha-Bahir "Book of the Tree" The Sefer ha-Bahir describes the Sephiroth, the "Great Lights" of the Spheres. It is an account of the origin of the Tradition's arrival at the Sphere system as well as the basic text on Sphere magic.

Sefer ha-Gilgulim "Book of Returning Souls" The Sefer ha-Gilgulim is the treatise on Avatars, on the Entelechy, and complex speculation on the nature of the relationship between mages and their Avatars. Before *Gilgul* was the term for shredding a mage's Avatar, it was simply the ancient Hebrew word for Avatar. With time, the other words in the name of the process of shredding Avatars were dropped, and the word for Avatar came into the common parlance meaning "the shredding of the Avatar."

Sefer ha-Zohar "Book of Splendor" The Sefer ha-Zohar describes ten paths toward human perfection, catalogues the techniques and benefits of perfecting the self, gives an account of the history and metaphysical purpose of evil and provides complex alchemical formulae for the transformation of evil into good. This is the book the Nephandi would most like to destroy because it provides a relatively clear and accurate account of the redemption of a barabbi mage's Avatar.

Sefer Nitsotsoth "Book of Sparks" The "sparks" referred to in the Sefer Nitsotsoth are the greatest of the known extant Spirits: Incarna, Umrood Lords and Ladies, the *djinn* Caliphs as well as the more powerful and abstract Spirits contacted by the University of Light *murshids*. The title refers to an image from the text of humanity building a bonfire at the base of Jebel Qaf, and the sparks from that bonfire rising into the night sky and illuminating, just the merest bit, the slopes of the Great Mountain and the entities that reside thereon.

Sefer Tselem "Book of the Shape of the Unity" The Sefer Tselem is the University of Light's key text in explaining the relationship between the Doctrine of Unity, the Correspondence Point and the Sphere of Binah (Correspondence), and one of the Batini Kabbalists' most fundamental texts.

these studies alive and vigorous. While a Hermetic magician might be content to duplicate a formula of immortality, the Silk Cartel seeks out newer formulae, changing praxes and ways to incorporate modern knowledge. Similarly, a Technocratic engineer builds upon structured, rigorous, mathematically proven measures, but the Batini of the Silk Cartel recognize that the most profound and difficult (and, therefore, enlightening) of mazes are those that change in response to the individual walking within.

With a dearth of students, the Silk Cartel may need some work to revitalize itself, or its practices might become subsumed in other factions. Still, the few teachers in the Cartel seem reluctant to change their esoteric entry procedures — postulants must surpass some sort of mental puzzle, a matter that usually seems like a simple test of escaping a maze or managing to retain some grasp of lucidity in the face of mind-altering substances, but often these challenges become far more difficult in the execution (sometimes even spawning episodes of Quiet or dragging out subconscious fears of the subject).

The Silk Cartel will stand or fall based on this generation of its students. Almost like a metaphor for the Ahl-i-Batin as a whole, its fate rests on a crux and can tip to renewed prominence or permanent oblivion.

The Paradise Garden

Located in Isfahan, Iran, the Paradise Garden is one of the most intensive environments a Batini *mutasawwif* is likely to experience. The primary focus of the *khanate* is the re-establishment of the *qutbs*, the great masters of Mind who once directed the efforts of the Tradition, and through the Tradition, the fate and direction of the Arabic world.

Historically, the Ahl-i-Batin of the Paradise Garden were frequently viziers to powerful sultans. By having the ear of those in power, the Batini were able to pursue a subtle program of social engineering while avoiding the limelight. All a Batini needed to sway the direction of a sultanate was a few carefully chosen, perfectly whispered words providing new guidance for a sultan, and his will would be made law. Through such means the Subtle Ones pursued a program of "nudging" the Arabic world towards Unity.

Once the Technocracy stripped most political power from the hands of the Ahl-i-Batin *and* killed most of the Qutbs, the Paradise Garden, used to enjoying a significant degree of control over the Arabic world, was unable to do anything to re-establish itself. In the face of that situation, the new murshid of the *khanate*, still

grieving over the death of the beloved Qutb Ustad Akhdir Jabal, established a new focus: waging an undetectable guerilla war on the Technocracy via subtle telepathic means.

Initiates studying at the Paradise Garden undergo rigorous training in survival and stealth techniques including silent movement and the use of camouflage. The rationale behind this program is that the next generation of Qutbs won't have the luxury of operating from a cushy oasis, operating, instead, from a mobile base of operations that prevents Technocratic forces from responding in strength should they discern the Qutb's whereabouts.

The mental techniques taught at the Paradise Garden are among the most devastating known and include mental defense, misdirection, persuasion and suggestion. Murids who have studied at the Paradise Garden possess enough skill in psychological manipulation that in most face to face encounters with Sleepers, they won't even need to use magic to meet their objective. If they *do* need to use the Mind Sphere, it will be subtle indeed — just enough to push the target into acquiescence.

Magical training follows along similar lines. Mind techniques for thought control, surreptitious interrogation and empathic manipulation are taught as backups to the Subtle Ones' mundane skills. Initiates also learn Correspondence-assisted search and reconnaissance techniques for locating their targets.

The ironic thing about the Paradise Garden is that it really is just a few low buildings surrounded by groves of citrus trees and vast gardens of jasmine and roses. The serene surroundings are at odds with the militant course of study

Ikhwan at-Tawhid

The Brethren of the Unified Soul are reclusive ascetics and sacred assassins who neutralize, by whatever means necessary, those who undermine the acknowledgement of the Unity.

While the Ikwhan at-Tawhid is commonly said to be based in Mecca, only their guiding Murshid, Aziz Akhtar, spends any time there. The actual training grounds for the Initiates of the Unified Soul are some three hundred kilometers to the east and south in the depths of the desert. It is here, more than any other place in the Middle East, that the Ahl-i-Batin and the Taftâni come into contact. The two groups are cautious of each other and somewhat curious, but any interaction between two groups is strictly formal. While the philosophies of the two Disparate Traditions are almost diametrically opposed, most members of both group were originally brought up within the Arab culture and share some commonalities.

Unlike the other *khanates*, the Ikhwan at-Tawhid is composed solely of men. This has nothing to do with any acknowledged policy, but women are simply not drawn to the constant physical conflict and training in the arts of assassination

The Brethren of the Unified Soul pursue rigorous and seemingly non-stop physical training in armed and unarmed combat, stealth, assassination techniques and body-control and adaptation techniques (what most Technocrats would probably refer to as extremely advanced biofeedback Procedures).

The training of the Brethren is not solely physical. Like the Batini of the Paradise Garden, a great deal of attention is paid to non-magical mental techniques including Interrogation, Misdirection and Persuasion.

An important difference between the Paradise Gardeners and the Brethren of the Unified Soul is that the former are primarily concerned with assassination while the latter are also concerned with extracting information from their opponents. Many of their magical and non-magical techniques alike focus on drawing complete and honest answers from their targets. Physical torture is anathema to the Batini, who consider it among the least subtle acts men commit. That does not mean, however, that a Batini interrogator won't use harsh methods, just that the mage will do what he needs to do telepathically, leaving the target's body alone entirely.

The Brethren of the Unified Soul focus on three tenets in their training that they are expected to understand and embody.

Mastery of the Self: The *mutasawwif* is expected to have a deep understanding of himself, his weaknesses and his potential by the time he reaches murid status. Aziz Akhtar teaches that a man's most dangerous enemy is that part of himself that remains unknown. Therefore, there should be no part of his mind that is secret or unknown to him if he truly wants to walk the tariqa.

Self-Reliance: While it is possible that a man may have friends to back him up in difficult situations, it is always best to train with the assumption that he does not. Friends can be killed; they can turn on you; they can lose their nerve. Likewise, spirits can rebel or be banished. Tools can break or be lost. The Brethren of the Unified Soul teach that a man should strive to be reliant only on himself and his skills. To do this, obviously, a man must have a wide range of skills.

What the Hell *is* a Qutb, Anyway?

The Qutbs were Masters of the Mind Sphere who kept up communication among the Ahl-i-Batin across vast stretches of desert. They were effectively one of the pillars supporting the Batini Tradition for centuries.

Technically, the Arabic term *qutb* means "pole," as in "an axis on which the Earth spins." The word also has connotations of a perfect man or a saint. The Qutbs were all of these things.

To join the ranks of the Qutbs, a mage had to be a Master of the Mind Sphere and have a good understanding of Correspondence as well. Furthermore, he had to know the Doctrine of Unity and be capable of quoting it verbatim in its entirety. Lastly, the Qutb had to be considered a paragon of Ahl-i-Batin virtue (i.e., he had to be subtle, brilliant and highly disciplined). The Qutb's character had to be beyond reproach because Qutbs were, among other things, the judges who made rulings on issues pertaining to Batini doctrine as well as moral compasses that any Batini could check telepathically if he were unsure of how to proceed in a given situation.

More formally, Qutbs were the mediums through which meetings of the Tradition were held, acting as narrow casters, mentally linking the murshids and murids into a network of consciousnesses, basically acting as the operator in a telepathic conference call.

When the Technocracy caught on to the Qutbs and realized their importance to the Ahl-i-Batin, they were earmarked for quick eradication. The assassination of the Qutbs took time — much more time than the Technocracy had expected, in fact. Mind Masters with high level of Correspondence and a respectable Arcane rating are *not* easy targets, after all, but by 1930, many of the Qutbs — and there weren't *that* many to begin with — had been tracked down and killed. The surviving Qutbs fell silent and went into hiding (many with the help of the Ritual of Ghayba "Occultation"), and the Tradition rapidly fell apart as murids lost their direction and murshids lost their ability to lead. For years, the five *khanates* became largely autonomous, trying to maintain a degree of order and discipline, even in the face of wave after wave of Technocratic and Nephandic attacks and the ensuing paranoia. That approach didn't work well, but it worked well enough. Though the end looked imminent by the 1960, the Tradition did not die out, and when some wily old Batini Masters, too old to fear for their lives, came out of hiding to provide some guidance, the Tradition stabilized somewhat. Even that would not have been enough to save the Subtle Ones had fate not intervened on their behalf.

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the rule of the Ayatollah Khomenei effectively ended Technocratic control of Iran. Taking advantage of the situation, a number of the aging Qutbs stepped out of Occultation and gathered in Isphahan in the Paradise Garden to discuss the future of the Tradition.

New Qutbs had not been trained for several decades, but the gathered Batini "saints" discussed the matter at length and decided to train qualified Adepts in the skills necessary to become a Qutb. A handful of new Qutbs have been trained since then, and others are being taught the skills currently.

Within Iran, the Qutbs currently function much as they did in the old days, maintaining a constant state of communication between Batini, though they're notably more paranoid than they used to be. Their communications, furthermore, are now point cast to only the minds they need to reach to minimize the chance of Technocratic spying (of which there is a great deal.) Technocratic statisticians have already stated that there is a great likelihood that the Ahl-i-Batin are using this opportunity to regroup, but they've also stated that there's very little they can do about it for the moment, and the level of organizational frustration in Technocracy bases throughout the Middle East is palpable.

The Ahl-i-Batin are fully aware that the political winds in Iran are changing and the end of their reprieve is close at hand. They are being very careful to maintain their secrecy now, so that when the Technocracy washes back in like the flooding Nile, their newfound strength will not be lost.

Outside of Iran, the new Qutbs do not provide the constant telepathic background that their forebears did. More than anything else, they function more like pirate radio stations, pointcasting short telepathic "squirts" of information to carefully chosen Batini.

With the re-establishment of Tradition-wide communication, the Ahl-i-Batin are once more capable of acting in unison, putting their finely honed discipline to work for a shared goal once more, and as the Paradise Garden turns out more Qutbs, the Tradition's reach is likely to extend even farther than it once did.

Adaptability: You may walk across the dunes, you may see that the dunes are in the same place for weeks on end, but do not assume that they will always be in the same place because they can change after a single strong storm. Life is the same. People change. Goals change. Places change. Be capable of adapting to any situation with no brief moment of clinging to what came before. It is by blending perfectly with those around us that we became known as the Subtle Ones.

The Ikhwan at-Tawhid in Makkah has always trained more than its share of assassins. The Brethren of the Unified Soul's rigorous emphasis on the Spheres of Correspondence, Life and Mind, combined with that khanate's strict rules of self-mastery, self-reliance and hyper-adaptability make them the ideal candidates when an adversary is pushing too hard.

Darwushim

The Darwushim of Baghdad are little changed from the Darwushim who were merged with the Warring Hands on the Night of Fana. They are the most extreme ascetics among the Ahl-i-Batin, and some think of them as the "primitives" of the Ahl-i-Batin because they're less abstract in their outlook. Asceticism and self-denial are fundamental to the Darwushim: they wear course wool robes, generally go without shoes, and frequently attain mystical states of consciousness through fasting, self-inflicted pain, and spinning in place for days on end. They still rely on whirling and dancing to attain mystical insights, and they're the only Batini faction with any degree of chaos about them; all the other *khanates* are undeniably in love with control. Still, even in their ecstatic states, Darwushim ecstasy is more controlled than the most balanced moment of many other mages' existence.

The point of the Darwushim's whirling is to feel a state of frenzy or ecstasy, and then to let the orderly mind trace that ecstatic state back to its origins in the Unity. The fusion of the ecstatic and the rational states of mind grants understanding far in excess of what either alone is capable of.

The physical techniques studied by the Darwushim in their desert *khanate* outside of Baghdad include dancing, drumming and transcending (or reaching greater awareness through) pain.

What that means, specifically to the Darwushim, who specialize in conjunctional Correspondence and Prime Effects, is that they are capable of watching the flow of Quintessence as it pulses through the world. The trance of the Darwushim allows them to watch the flow of the blood of the world through its veins, and if they extend their perceptions to the heart that pumps that blood, then they are perceiving the Unity, sitting serenely at the center of all. Like strange alchemists, the Darwushim are constantly juxtaposing conflicting experiences and sensations in an attempt to see which sensation or combination of sensations grants them the clearest understanding of, and control over, the flow of Worldblood.

Darwushim who reach the third rank of Prime almost always keep their bodies charged up with Quintessence because to do so, from their perspective, grants them a closer connection to the Unity.

More Darwushim have undergone the Ritual of Occultation than any other faction. Understanding of the Prime Sphere is key to the enchantment of the body, and the Darwushim are very attentive to the flow of Quintessence through the world. It is also the case that Ghayba is an extremely difficult state to enter without an ascetic background. Others cannot take note of or even sense an Occulted individual, and interacting with society is impossible. For one used to living the life of an ascetic hermit, however, entering Occultation isn't much of a problem.

The chief mental disciplines studied by the Darwushim involve reaching states of ecstasy as well as discerning varieties of ecstasy. Any murid among the Darwushim can discern different types of ecstatic states like a Bedouin can tell apart different types of camels.

Ecstasy Part I: What It Is

There are those who believe that ecstasy is a fancy word for sexual pleasure, and, despite how often marketing agencies might misuse the word that way, that's not the primary denotation of the word.

The word ecstasy comes from the Greek word *ekstasis*, which means "to be outside of one's self" or "to be out of one's mind." An ecstatic state is one in which an individual feels as though he's not in control of his body, that he's being simultaneously empowered and pushed out of his body by some greater force and allowed to do things that he's incapable of doing in normal states of mind, whether that inability stems from physical limitations, psychological barriers or moral or ethical constraints.

Ecstatic states can be brought about by chanting, dancing, intense emotional states and psychoactive agents, and they typically take a great deal out of the individual entering the trance, requiring at least a few hours of rest afterwards.

Ecstasy Part II: How the Darwushim Use It

There are different varieties of ecstatic experience. Through conscious cultivation, the Darwushim are capable of determining which kind of ecstasy washes over them.

Trances and ecstatic states are in that fuzzy area between real life and magical life. The Storyteller may opt to allow some small benefit to the character just from entering the trance or he may decide that the trance is actually a magical Effect requiring an Arete roll. Of the ecstatic states listed here, only the Communal Ecstasy requires an Arete roll. (An example of an ecstatic state that *definitely* requires an Arete roll is the Darwushim Battle Trance in the Rotes section.)

Combat Ecstasy: In a state of Combat Ecstasy, the Darwushim channels an enormous amount of rage and feels as though that rage is directing his actions for the duration of the trance. Others appear as though they're moving in slow motion, and when the dervish returns to a normal state of mind, he's unlikely to remember what transpired while he was in the Combat Ecstasy.

While in a state of combat ecstasy, the dervish feels no pain, does not bleed from wounds and can tap into enormous reserves of Strength and Dexterity. Others seem to move very slowly as the dervish's reflexes become much, much faster. Auditory sensations may become "blurry" or the dervish may not hear anything at all for the duration of the combat trance.

Communal Ecstasy: When two or more Darwushim want to communicate very intimately, they may enter a Communal Ecstasy together. Unlike the other ecstatic states, the communal trance has to build over the course of several hours, and generally involves a great deal of physical contact, looking into each other's eyes and the like, and must be in a safe and private setting. The degree of intimacy involved in this trance can be extremely uncomfortable for those unused to this degree of closeness, particularly if both (or all, as the case may be) participants are men, but it allows for complete communication in circumstances that might not allow it otherwise.

In a Communal Ecstasy, so long as even one of the participants has reached the first Rank in the Mind Sphere, the participants are able to communicate via telepathy. This ability only works during the course of the trance, which takes at least an hour to enter.

Radiant Ecstasy: When a dervish needs a lot of energy all at once, he can put himself into a state of mind where his body seems to have no limits. The Radiant Ecstasy grants him enormous amounts of energy, Stamina and Strength.

The Darwushim cultivate Radiant Ecstasy if they need to run long distances, climb tall vertical surfaces or push themselves beyond their normal physical limits in a variety of ways.

Vigilant Ecstasy: When the Darwushim are concerned about an attack from without, they can spin themselves into a Vigilant Ecstasy that makes them hyper-alert to potential aggression. By extending their arms out to the side with the palms facing forward and spinning, the dervish feels the world around himself and becomes highly attuned to the motions of every person and object around him. During a Vigilant Ecstasy, the Darwushim gain access to heightened degrees of Perception, Wits Alertness and Awareness.

The whole body becomes hypersensitive when the dervish is in a state of Vigilant Ecstasy, including the stomach. If the dervish has eaten recently, he much empty his stomach by vomiting before entering the trance, otherwise nausea will prevent the dervish from paying attention to anything else.

While the Ahl-i-Batin are the underdogs in most conflicts they find themselves in, there is one form of conflict resolution at which they are particularly adept. That technique is assassination.

Unlike the loud and warlike Taftâni, the Batini are not particularly skilled at — or fond of — direct combat. They are, after all, on a quest for Unity, not divisiveness or conflict. That said, however, the world is a violent place, and the Subtle Ones have many enemies bent on their destruction.

The Batini have found that the best way to deal with persecution by their enemies is to disappear (literally or figuratively) and then pop up later to slay their enemies when they're vulnerable. Given the Ahl-i-Batin skill with the Sphere of Correspondence, this is a real and formidable threat.

The Batini term for assassin, *khilwat*, literally means "a silence," as in, "The silence followed him home from his lab and killed him." It comes from an old term referring to any Ahl-i-Batin that fell out of use for many years. It has come back into parlance at the Ikhwan at-Tawhid and the Paradise Garden to refer specifically to those Subtle Ones who assassinate the enemies of the Tradition.

All five khanates have trained *khilwati* at one point or another in their history, though the University of Light has done so only *in extremis*. Two of the five Batini khanates (factions) currently train assassins as a matter of course and a third provides those *khilwati* with particularly effective tools for their work.

The Ikhwan at-Tawhid in Makkah has always trained more than its share of assassins. The Brethren of the Unified Soul's rigorous emphasis on the Spheres of Correspondence, Life and Mind, combined with that khanate's strict rules of self-mastery, self-reliance and hyper-adaptability, make the Ahl-i-Batin trained there the ideal subtle killers.

With the Sphere of Life, a Brother of the Unified Soul can change anything about himself — his build, his face, his voice, his fingerprints and, if he knows to do so, his retina pattern — as needed to get past security. Likewise, even subtle Mind Effects can make a Batini's enemy play into his hands. Correspondence, obviously, makes these Effects work at a distance or through walls. Since bitter enemies are the same as close friends, and a long-term nemesis has the same degree of connection as a companion, such magic frequently doesn't even require a huge number of successes.

What's more, the Brethren are lethal in hand-to-hand combat. Though it is viewed with suspicion by some Batini purists (who feel it's not subtle enough), many of them use their rigorous desert training in concert with the Life Sphere to slowly but surely transform themselves into perfect physical specimens (i.e. four or five dots in all Physical Attributes, for those capable of such incredible development).

In recent years, the *khilwati* of the Ikhwan at-Tawhid have been responsible for the deaths of several Marauders and Nephandi and over a hundred Technocratic operatives — a remarkable accomplishment given that only a handful of such mages exist.

There was a time when the Paradise Garden *khanaqah* in Isphahan was devoted entirely to teaching the Doctrine of Unity and its myriad ramifications (particularly as they pertained to the Spheres of Correspondence and Mind). After the death of their great teacher, the *qutb* Ustad Akhdir Jabal, however, the Paradise Garden also began to train assassins whose devotion has frequently been called fanatical.

The assassins from the Paradise Garden focus strictly on advanced Correspondence and Mind Effects and their varied uses in assassination. Rather than use poison or hand-to-hand combat like the Unified Brethren, the *khilwati* of the Paradise Garden use Mind Effects at range to make the target neutralize himself. The Gardeners use illusions and mind control, for example, to cause their targets to drive over cliffs (hidden by illusion), to take electric radios into the shower and to mistake drain cleaner for tea. Alternatively, the Subtle One can manipulate the target's emotions, bringing about suicidal states of mind, self-destructive addictions or manic states that result in lethal carelessness. Certain Technocratic offices in the Middle East have taken to testing operatives for Mind control, but when all an assassin has to do is nudge a pre-existing instability, there's not much that can be done. There *is* no way to guard against a truly determined Batini assassin once his skills have been sufficiently honed by training.

While the *khilwati* trained in Isfahan are among the most dangerous Ahl-i-Batin alive, they truly *are* fanatical in their hatred of the Technocracy and, consequently, they rarely act against non-Technocratic targets. Vampires are the only exception to that rule. Any vampire known to have preyed on *any* mage, not just Batini, is marked for immediate death by Paradise Gardeners. Given vampires' emotional instability, it's rarely a problem for the Subtle One to strategically ignite a monster's rage or terror in a way that will end in its death.

Backing up all the Ahl-i-Batin assassins is the Silk Cartel, the Batini Alchemists based out of Samarkand in Uzbekistan. The Cartel provides Ahl-i-Batin *khilwati* with Talismans, poisons and tools for use against the enemies of the Ahl al-'adl wa 'l-tawhad.



Paradigm and Foci



The Ahl-i-Batin typically strive to keep their magic as subtle as possible, frequently only using magic to nudge reality the slightest bit in the direction of their desire. They combine rigorous mental and physical training with intense study of alchemy, psychology, sacred geometry, gematria and other esoteric arts to allow them to perform powerful "slights of mind."

Correspondence: No other Sphere plays to the Ahl-i-Batin's strengths as well as Correspondence. The *wahdat al-wujud*, not unlike certain hyper-advanced scientific theories, teaches that all points are one point. To a Batini, therefore, we are all everywhere at once, and it is only our lack of clear understanding of Unity that prevents us from realizing and acting on that fact. Meditation, Mobius strips, labyrinths, mirrors, the angles of shadows, the swirling chaos of sand storms, and highly abstract techno-mystical maps, charts, ephemeredes and compasses all help the Subtle Ones to understand their place within the Unity.

Forces: On those rare instances when the Subtle Ones utilize the Sphere of Forces, they may use any number of complex foci, including lenses, mirrors, prisms, complex mathematical formulae, assorted techno-mystical mechanisms (orreries and the like) and all manner of alchemically derived essences and powders. From these foci the Batini channel the all manner of energies; prisms and mirrors can separate out specific Forces from the Unity of the Tellurian, while orreries, staves and other calculating tools assist in the direction of existing energies. As the Sphere of Forces isn't exactly the most low-key, most Batini confine their understanding to observations and minute redirections, but when pressed some mages have a surprising facility with light focused through crystals on the ends of meticulously-designed mathematically perfect staves, energies channeled through gem-studded geometric sigils on amulets or tremendous clockwork machines that harness the power of the Earth itself.

Life: Meditation, ecstatic trances, extreme fitness and training, strange potions and pharmacological agents all empower the Batini to take control of his body. Many Batini practice rigorous disciplines of flexibility and stamina training as a part of their practice in combat, stealth or survival, although as previously

noted the idea of "targeted exercise for exercise's sake" isn't a popular one. Rather, the Batini rely on the strengths of bodies that constantly see use and honing in all manner of situations. Since these mages don't allow themselves to become sedate, they often have stronger builds and better ability to cope with injury. More spectacular transformations, like actual shifting of the body or changing of other Life Patterns, often comes with the alchemical concoctions with which the Batini are so familiar. These can be consciousness-changing, opening the Batini's mind so that he can rebuild his body, or they might actually have physical repercussions; tiny bottles and small cylinders of soft pastes are staples of such transformative elixirs. Notably, many Batini concoctions are poisonous, and the body must adapt to metabolize and change them into a form with which it can coexist — a symbolic change to accept a Unity.

Matter: The Batini alchemists in Samarkand use flasks, bottles, alembics, kilns, rare essences and, for difficult Effects, full laboratories full of strange potions and brass instruments to effect their magic. Such training is not common throughout the Tradition, but many Batini have at least a passing familiarity with esoteric acids and mystical salves (the same principles behind their Life magic). Generally, Batini aren't so vulgar as to reshape physical structures or change traits such as density and mass, but they do make a variety of alloys — "Damascus steel" is just another on a long list of credits that the Batini claim (even though its invention seems to predate the Tradition as a whole).

Mind: The Ahl-i-Batin were practicing the arts of psychology long before Dr. Freud came onto the scene. By knowing the tendencies and weaknesses of the human mind, the Subtle Ones are capable of eliciting the responses they want from their target with nothing more than a carefully inflected word or an arched eyebrow. One common Batini Mind technique is "patterning," in which the Ahl-i-Batin incorporates repeated subtle cues in his speech and gestures to plant subconscious impulses in his target's mind. The Batini might always touch the subject on a specific part of the arm when mentioning anything having to do with money, for instance; in time, the subject subconsciously comes to associate the two. With a simple touch or phrase the Batini can generate a predictable result.

For affecting himself, the Batini may use meditative exercises to access the full potential of his own highly-trained mind. Alternatively, the mage might have access to certain pharmacologically active substances that allow him to boost his mind's natural abilities to extraordinary levels.

Prime: The Darwushim are skilled at entering altered states of consciousness through dance, trance and meditation. When they have shrugged off the blinders of quotidian awareness, they can see (and possibly channel) the flow of Quintessence around them. A "whirling dervish" literally channels the energies of the Tellurian through his body, with his outstretched arms reaching to Heaven and Earth and acting as a pole between the two.

The Batini combine Prime very effectively with their understanding of Correspondence. The Web of Faith, still largely intact, remains a symbol of this union. Often, Batini build structures to channel mundane substances that also carry a mirrored stash of Prime energy; an aqueduct can sluice Quintessence as well as water, especially given the emotional importance of water to desert cultures.

Combinations of Prime and Mind result in command over Resonance, another technique with which Batini have familiarity. The Batini understand that reinforcing specific emotions or actions can cause Resonance; just as patterning allows the implant of subtexts in the mind, so too does it reinforce or counter Resonance in places or things. Physical structures such as academies, mazes and observatories often have a built-in dual purpose, serving both according to their outward form but also a shell that encapsulates a specific Resonance or encourages a form of Prime flow. Most often this helps to eradicate or wash away Resonance; the Batini prefer a tidy structure uncluttered with preconceptions when building a place for learning or magic.

Spirit: While Batini mages are capable of using Solomonic Code to bind and control djinn, they typically prefer to traffic with *much* more abstract spirits; consequently foci for Spirit Effects include mathematical equations, Kabbalistic formulae, old scrolls, complex sigils, prayer, chanting and other forms of complex and highly formal magic.

Time: Music, meditation and breathing exercises allow the Batini to attune themselves to the cycles and pulse of time. The Time Effect Batini use most frequently is the hastening of their own movements, which typically requires esoteric breathing techniques. The compression of Time comes from the use of smokes or incenses that change different participants' view of time flow, or by using ecstatic trance to move outside the flow of Time. Batini rarely indulge in stepping outside of Time altogether; as befits their similarities to the Cult of Ecstasy they are more likely to send their consciousness on trips across Time instead of physically traveling.

Labyrinths

A portion of the Ahl-i-Batin's study of sacred geometry and architecture manifested as a deep reverence for symbolic structures. Practitioners of sacred geometry maintain that structures built in accordance with mystical principles are capable of channeling, representing or triggering mystic forces, natural phenomena or states of mind. In the Ahl-i-Batin worldview, labyrinths are among the most powerful of these sacred structures.

Batini labyrinths were usually relatively simple, having only a single path that twisted and turned wildly until it led to a sacred chamber at the labyrinth's center. Unlike the common understanding of labyrinths, the Ahl-i-Batin's labyrinths were not about deceit or misdirection; there was only one path into the sacred chamber at the center and the practitioner would walk the same path out. Some labyrinths were created with walls, others were dug through stone, and others were simply outlines of the path inlaid, chiseled or painted on the floor of a large room. Eventually, the actual walls of the labyrinth were viewed as unnecessary. Walking the labyrinth was never about the external experience of being between two walls; it was about the subjective, internal experience of being on a defined path that went into the sacred center and then wended its way back out.

For the Ahl-i-Batin, walking the labyrinth was a form of moving meditation, a way of going inward, however the mage chose to interpret that act. This had particular meaning for the Batini who viewed all systems of religion and spirituality as having an obvious, exoteric element (which they referred to as the *Zahir*), and a subtler, hidden, esoteric element (called the *Batin*). By seeking the *Batin* in all things, the mage was thought to develop a deeper understanding of all things, including the Unity and the structure of Jebel Qaf.

At the Tradition's peak, several initiates would walk the pattern at one time. As each approached the entrance to the labyrinth, the presiding Batini Murid would anoint the initiate's forehead with oil or perfume and whisper something — generally a riddle, a benediction or an aphorism — into the initiate's ear as she entered the labyrinth. The *mutasawwif* was to ponder those words as she walked the labyrinth.

Arriving at the center of the labyrinth was a mystical metaphor for many things, depending on the initiate's intent: mental focus, comprehending the nature of Unity, knowledge gained along the path of life, the shape of the Tapestry and the way to Jebel Qaf among others. Once the *mutasawwif* reached the center, she would stop. Depending on the local tradition, the initiate would sometimes chant, pray, spin or recite poetry. When she was finished, she would retrace her steps out of the labyrinth, passing as she went those who were still on their way to the center.

Walking the labyrinth was considered a deeply sacred and symbolic act to the Ahl-i-Batin. Their name literally means "the interior ones" or "those of the interior way," and passage through the labyrinth was ideally suited to the Batini's understanding of magic.

For a time, the Subtle Ones were successful in spreading their understanding of the labyrinth as an instrument of meditation and understanding, and such structures were built throughout the known world. Many can still be found throughout the Mediterranean world if not the Arabic one. Various forces, notably nature and the Technocracy, have done a very effective job of destroying or covering over most of the labyrinths in the Arabic world, while those in other parts of the world have simply fallen into disuse.

Ironically, the last well-known labyrinth is in the cathedral in Chartres, France, where the Celestial Chorus occasionally uses it for purposes similar to those of the Subtle Ones. While Choristers might be loath to allow a Batini into the labyrinth (many Choristers find the Ahl-i-Batin's notions of the Unity to be somewhat heretical), a Subtle One gaining access to that edifice might be able to use it to achieve some impressive results.

The Ahl-i-Batin and the Black Labyrinth

Given that many Batini had walked labyrinths throughout their magical lives, it's not surprising that the Iblisi had such an easy time convincing other Ahl-i-Batin to walk the Nephandic Labyrinth (sometimes called the Black Labyrinth or the Black Spiral). When the actions of the Iblisi came to light, the majority of the Tradition could not believe that the labyrinth, long held to be one of the best tools for teaching insight, could be used for the purposes of corruption. Right up until the end, they expected walking the Black Labyrinth to have no effect. Surprisingly, about half the time, they were right.

The Nephandi assumed that their corruption of the labyrinth was automatic. They never realized that labyrinths were such powerful tools for self-under-



standing among the Ahl-i-Batin that many Subtle Ones could use the labyrinth — even as it was acting on them — as a tool that let them sense the impinging waves of corruption and either fight it or retreat so deeply into themselves that it couldn't touch them. Furthermore, by recognizing the power of the labyrinth as a means to self-exploration, the Batini *removed* walls instead of being enclosed by them and found knowledge instead of becoming lost; this reversal of the Nephandic purpose meant that traversing the labyrinths often didn't have the corruptive effects that the *barabbi* expected.

Of the Batini who walked the labyrinth, about half still succumbed and became *barabbi*. Of the remaining half, a small handful simply disappeared once they reached the center, and the Nephandi were left wondering what went wrong. Most became catatonic, retreating so far within the labyrinth of their own minds that nothing — not corruption, not pain, not telepathy — could reach them. The remaining uncorrupted Batini became inadvertent spies, telepathically alerting the *qutbs* to the Nephandi's actions. Although the Nephandi discovered some of those (in which case the spies were slowly tortured to death), some old Ahl-i-Batin believe that there may still be ancient Batini infiltrators under deep cover within the Cauls of the Nephandi.

Resonance

The Ahl-i-Batin dislike Resonance, feeling that it is a random bit of information, a clue of sorts, that they don't like to give their enemies. When possible, Batini mages do what they can to dampen or mitigate Resonance, and some study the Sphere of Prime specifically for that reason.

When the Subtle Ones do allow Resonance to color them or their magic, it tends to reflect the highly cerebral and abstract nature of their esoteric practices that generally grants either a Static or Dynamic spin to their magic. With the possible exception of the Darwushim, the Ahl-i-Batin are too controlled and intellectual for their magic to take on much if any Primordial/EntropicResonance. While they may focus on manipulating fundamental cosmological elements like space, time and Quintessence, their understanding of those primal elements is so filtered and directed by study and control that it contains little of the madness, destruction or chaos that are the earmarks of Entropic Essence.

The following are types of Resonance that any Ahl-i-Batin mage might show. Most are likely to fall under the heading of Static, though some could be interpreted as Dynamic or even Entropic: Controlled, Cerebral, Complex, Convoluted, Deceptive, Echoing, Enigmatic, Intellectual, Layered and Unfathomable.

In addition to the flavors of Resonance exhibited by Batini in general, the various *khanates* of the Batini Tradition all have their own particular patterns of Resonance as well.

The magic performed by the Kabbalists of the University of Light often has Resonance that could best be described as: Abstract, Angelic, Demonic, Ephemeral and Rarefied.

The Resonance of the Alchemists of the Silk Cartel tends toward Alchemical, Formulaic, Manipulative, Structured and Transformative.

The mentalists of the Paradise Garden show Resonance that is: Arcane, Demanding, Obfuscatory, Oneiric and Subtle.

The Brethren of the Unified Soul undergo rigorous physical and mental training at the Ikhwan at-Tawhid that makes their Resonance: Aggressive, Clear, Disciplined, Focused and Unrelenting.

The Resonance of the trance-prone Darwushim tends to be: Ecstatic, Enlightening, Frenzied, Meditative and Raw.

Sphere Specialties

Correspondence: The Subtle Ones have long studied the intricacies and mysteries of the Correspondence Sphere, and depending on which of the five factions a Batini comes from, he may specialize however he sees fit.

Of the common specialties, Conjuration is the least practiced. Some Batini may use it because the "Oh, look, I happen to have it right here," effect is both subtle and very useful.

Batini who engage in assassination make frequent use of Scrying, though they typically do so by entering a trance (typically by whirling) and do so with their "inner eye" as opposed to using any sort of device.

The need to travel vast distances rapidly has frequently made Teleportation a specialty for the Ahl—i-Batin as a whole. Though teleportation is notably unsubtle, its usefulness outweighs all other concerns. More than once has a Batini disappeared into a sandstorm or a dark alley only to reappear moments later far away. Labyrinths all have a mystically-connected center point, and a Batini might walk a labyrinth in one locale only to appear in another. Similarly, the channels of the Web of Faith offer connections between far-flung places that the Batini can magically ride.

Distortion is extremely popular among the Ahl-i-Batin because of its subtlety. Slight distortions in space can allow a mage to see around corners, prevent bullets from hitting him and disorient opponents in a way that could be (indeed, has been) called insidious.

The Batini, on the whole, have a strong tendency toward paranoia; consequently quite a few specialize in Warding. They frequently use their knowledge of Correspondence to create small spaces for themselves that are effectively scry-proof. In conjunction with their affinity for Arcane, this makes many of these mages impossible to find.

Entropy: "True" Ahl-i-Batin can't use the Entropy Sphere at all and therefore have no specialties. The rare Orphaned mage or convert who somehow finds his way into the Tradition also does not find any sort of in-depth study that helps in specialty works in Entropy; indeed, such studies would be quite frowned upon.

It *is* known that at some time in the past — the Renaissance, certainly, and perhaps for some time after that — the Batini *did* use the Sphere of Entropy, and accepted its model in the Tradition council. The reason for the shift in policy is unknown. Experienced Batini do not study or use this Sphere. Those who study the esoterica of Avatar manifestations sometimes hint that, perhaps, the Entropic ban is more self-imposed than a matter of the Avatar's predilections — and yet, even Batini Adepts routinely show no understanding of this Sphere. The reasons for this change are lost to time and Occultation; the Subtle Ones do not have enough coherent history to explain what prompted this shift in thinking. Anyone who might know is so lost to Occultation that no record remains.

Forces: The Sphere of Forces is much too blatant for most Batini, who are happy to let the Taftâni play with fire. On those occasions when the Subtle Ones use Forces, it tends to be in ways that enhance their subtlety: Rotes to render the mage invisible and/or inaudible and the like. Some Batini specialize in weathercrafting, which allows them to summon sandstorms or needed rain. Forces also frequently does double duty as the Batini's Entropy Sphere with regard to damage-causing accidents; while Qismat may not intervene on the mage's behalf, a spark, a sudden gust of wind or a small area rendered friction-free can be all the "accident" a mage needs.

Life: Life is not one of the key Spheres for most Ahl-i-Batin; though they're unlikely to voice the opinion, many find it somewhat base. Some specialize in

healing, of course, but by far the most common Batini specialty in the Life Sphere is self-improvement.

The Brethren of Unified Soul have adopted both specialties as a part of the rigorous training that allows them to live in the hostile environments in which they train. Not only do they "enhance" themselves in small ways to make themselves more effective in harsh climes (see the Adaptation Rote, below), they also make subtle permanent improvements to their bodies that make them ideal physical specimens and terrifying physical combatants.

Matter: Batini who study the Sphere of Matter generally specialize in alchemy more for its philosophical ramifications on the Doctrine of Unity. The alchemists of the Silk Cartel are especially adept at brewing poisons, particularly those that work slowly or disappear from the bloodstream once the victim is dead.

Conjuration is the Batini's other Matter specialty, predominantly because it works so effectively in conjunction with Correspondence magic. Apportation isn't a key Effect in the Ahl-i-Batin repertoire, but it *is* amazing how many useful items they can hide in those loose clothes....

Mind: While Correspondence may be the Sphere the Batini are most adept at, Mind is the Sphere they use the most. An Ahl-i-Batin mage might specialize in any or all Mind techniques. Mind-Shielding and Self-Empowerment, are basic to the Batini's subtle existence while long-range telepathic communication has been effectively *de rigeur* since the *qutbs* first established their mindspace network across the Middle East. The Subtle Ones of the Paradise Garden frequently specialize in Illusion, Dream-crafting, Impulse Manipulation and Emotion and Mind Control magic.

Prime: The Ahl-i-Batin revere the Prime Sphere for its connection to the Unity. The ascetic Darwushim make frequent use of Prime to strengthen, empower and enchant their own patterns while the alchemists of the Silk Cartel focus on Artifice and Creation. A number of Batini appreciate the complexities of meta-magic — magic that acts on magic — and many of these Subtle Ones specialize in Countermagic and Unweaving.

Spirit: The Ahl-i-Batin are, on the whole, a very cerebral and stubbornly self-sufficient Tradition; abstract knowledge is the Batini's meat and drink. The Spirit Sphere, consequently, is therefore problematic for the Subtle Ones. While spirits provide mages with enormous amounts of information and vast knowledge about the more abstract elements of cosmology and the Tellurian as a whole, spirit dealings also violate the Batini ethic of self-sufficiency. For this reason, most Ahl-i-Batin avoid the Spirit Sphere. The Kabbalists of the University of Light, however, specialize in spirit dealings. They claim that they interact only with highly complex and abstract spirits (i.e., spirits of mathematics, alchemical spirits and the like, but also angels, demons and some old djinn), and then only to obtain knowledge available in no other way. This may or may not be true.

Time: The Ahl-i-Batin appreciate the Time Sphere for the same reason they like Correspondence and Prime: it's a complex and highly cerebral Sphere that requires a great deal of thought. That said, most Batini find Time magic a little too vulgar. Some of the Brethren of the Unified Soul incorporate use of the Time Sphere into their battle tactics, largely as a means for increased attacks and attack speed in combat. Others find that Time 4 makes for excellent traps. A boulder caught mid-fall with Time 4 can be set to finish its fall when someone steps into a cave. The same tactic can be used with portcullises, bullets or even explosions.

Perks and Problems

The Entropy Problem

True Ahl-i-Batin, whose Avatars are shards of the Entelechy, cannot use the Entropy Sphere. It does not work for them. Their Avatars are utterly incapable of channeling or manipulating Entropic energies, and even simple Rank 1 Entropic Rotes are impossible. The principle of how the Rote *should* work is clear, but, like trying to grip a tool with a numb arm, no matter how hard the mage tries, nothing happens.

Batini scholars have various theories explaining why this is so, most of which involve a lot of hand waving and circumlocution, generally sounding something like: "The Entropic Sphere has correspondences and affinities with the universal corrupting principle, and since the Entelechy was an angelic manifestation of the Unity's incorruptible perfection, it was unable to give us any connection to that principle, thereby protecting us from — and denying us access to — those corrupting forces." (This same line of reasoning, incidentally, is responsible for the Batini's enduring suspicion that they are, if not immune, at least highly resistant to Nephandic corruption. Those Ahl-i-Batin mages who *do* undergo Nephandic corruption, however, seem to have no difficulty with the Qlippothic Spheres, *including* Qlippothic Entropy [see **Infernalism: The Path of Screams**, page 81 for more information on the Qlippothic Spheres and page 22 of the **Book of Madness** for the details on Qlippothic Entropy.].

Obviously, the inability to perform Entropic magic is a serious disadvantage for the Ahl-i-Batin, largely

because Entropy is the ideal Sphere for performing subtle and coincidental magic. The Subtle Ones are therefore somewhat more challenged when it comes to keeping their magic coincidental, particularly since their specialty sphere, Correspondence, does not lend itself particularly well to coincidental Effects.

The Perils of Occultation

Arcane is a potent and useful Background at normal levels, and most mages are happy to have it working for them when their enemies begin making inquiries into their whereabouts. The higher levels of Arcane, accessible only to the Ahl-i-Batin, however, have pronounced and life-changing ramifications, and they are only for the most devoted (some might say, "extremist") Subtle One. After the sixth degree of Arcane, the Batini is no longer able to consciously dampen the effects at will and therefore cannot mitigate the problematic elements of her "condition."

Due to the intense impoverishment and enforced simplicity of life it causes, only truly dedicated Batini *murshids* are willing to undergo the Ritual of Occultation. Years of ascetic discipline prepare a Subtle One well for a life of Occultation: the mage must live from hand to mouth on anything she can find, raise or steal, because otherwise she'll starve.

Most Batini who opt for Occultation settle in quiet, rural places where they will be able to find (or scavenge) food and shelter. Most distract themselves from their intense solitude with contemplation of the Doctrine of Unity. Batini who return from a period of Occultation (which rarely last less than a year) often do so with great insights into the nature of Unity. Others find the experience traumatic and return a little mad. Some Batini re-enter *ghayba* as soon as possible, either to return to their contemplation or out of fear of discovery by enemies. It is believed that there are some among the Ahl-i-Batin, typically the aged or mad ones, who repeat the Ritual of Occultation until they fade completely out of existence. These brave souls are thought to become one with the Unity, and they would be considered saints if anyone could remember them.

The highest three degrees of Arcane are somewhat more powerful than those that precede them. Instead of taking dice from the searcher's dice pool, degrees eight, nine and ten subtract *successes* from the final roll.

••••• • Acquaintances don't recognize the mage without prompting. Records of the mage (photos, audio-recordings, plane reservations) get lost. Close friends and family completely forget the mage after a week.

••••• •• Friends don't remember the mage immediately. Close friends and family completely forget the mage after a day. Records of the mage are misfiled or destroyed. Large computer networks with information about the mage go down, and when they come back online, the mage's information is gone. Electronic banking, travel reservations and ownership of large items (like cars and houses) become impossible.

••••• ••• Others may still see the Batini, but they cannot connect an identity to her face, and once she's out of their presence they forget her immediately. Family and close friends will take a moment to remember whom the mage is when she talks with them. Even mirrors cast only vague blurred reflections of the Ahl-i-Batin and her shadow is pale. Telephones no longer pick up the Subtle One's voice.

••••• •••• The moment the Subtle One is no longer in their company, her family and closest friends forget her completely. They do not recognize pictures of her, and any possessions she's not carrying on her person are assumed to belong to someone else. Not only do others not *remember* the mage, they don't *notice* her in the first place, or at least not for several seconds. Drivers, for example, won't see her as she crosses the street. Wherever the mage's name is written, the ink smears until it is unreadable; all extant pictures of her become blurred. The Subtle One no longer casts a reflection or a shadow. Neither pens nor keyboards work for the mage.

••••• ••••• The mage cannot be sensed in any way (including sensory magic, Correspondence searches and telepathy), so no interaction with others is possible. All records of the mage are lost, destroyed, misplaced or thrown away. Devices like cameras, sound recorders and medical equipment are entirely incapable of registering the mage's existence. If the mage's name is written in stone, concrete or metal, the name chips or corrodes away. The mage suffers from brief moments of amnesia as she begins forgetting her own existence. For a moment or two, several times a week, she may physically fade from the Tellurian as her body becomes incorporeal.

Subtlety's Blessing

On the other hand, the Ahl-i-Batin have an advantage that other magi can only envy: They are not simply subtle by choice, they are subtle by nature. True Batini have an innate tendency toward occultation that protects them from the curious, the inquisitive and the unwary. All Subtle Ones have beginning maximum Arcane rating of 6, and *every* Batini character should have at least one dot of Arcane (as a Storyteller, you may go so far as to give this dot for free, as a partial recompense for the lack of Entropy magic). Those Batini who later learn the Ritual of Occultation (see "Ghayba," below) may raise their Arcane as high as 10, though few Ahl-i-Batin master the magical techniques necessary to do so.

Batini scholars, again, have their own theories regarding why this is the case. The boilerplate explanation sounds something like: "The Entelechy, which shattered and is divided among all the Ahl al-'adl wa 'l-tawhad, was the highest agent of The Unity. It is us and we are it. We are therefore inherently more connected to the Unity. At any moment, we are one place and we are many places. Those who look for us cannot find us because we are all around them."

Regardless of the cause, many of the Batini are notably difficult, if not impossible, to find. The Technocracy is quite certain that they are on the verge of eliminating the Disparates, including the Ahl-i-Batin. What the Technocracy doesn't realize is that for every Batini they have "neutralized," there are three in Occultation that not even their most powerful Enlightened Science can find.

Rotes

Batini magic rests on principles similar to that of the nine Traditions, as the Batini themselves were founders of the Tradition Council; still, their reluctance (and often inability) to use Entropy, combined with generations of separate, subtle development, have caused (some might say "forced") Batini magic into a slightly different direction. Rotes known to the Batini might not always work, or work the same way, for other Tradition mages; indeed, a highly-Occulted Batini's Rotes might have crucial parts just as forgotten as the instructor, leading to a situation where only the masters can create and remember the most powerful Rotes.

Adaptation (•• or ••• Life, sometimes with •• Forces)

This Rote is practically indispensable for Batini in the Ikwhan al-Tawhid *khanate* as it's the only thing that allows the Brethren of the Unified Soul to survive their desert training.



Through repeated exposure to the harsh desert climate, the murid learns to let his body do what it needs to do in order to survive. The skin grows thicker to protect from sun exposure and prevent sweating; the kidneys make much less, but much more concentrated, urine; a thin membrane that filters water vapor from breath grows in the Batini's larynx (giving the Unified Brethren's voice a somewhat disturbing quality), and the mage's body eliminates extra heat through the lungs (sometimes making his breath hot enough to burn unprotected skin).

This Rote also allows Batini to function in other difficult climates as well as underwater. While this Rote is almost always coincidental on land (owing to the remarkable adaptability of the human body), its underwater applications are almost always vulgar.

System: The simple Life 2 variant of this Rote is generally fine for desert training as the changes to the mage's pattern are minimal. For more extreme changes, like gills, the mage needs Life 3. The addition of Forces magic allows the mage to redirect dangerous environmental factors — extreme heat, cold or deep water pressure, for example — away from his body as well.

MET: Initiate (Basic) or Disciple (Intermediate) *Life*, optional Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces*. You change your body subtly to adapt to different environmental conditions and deflect hostile phenomena away from yourself. For the next scene/ hour, you suffer no penalties or injuries from any sort of normal environment: You do not suffer from heatstroke, frostbite or thin atmosphere of high altitude, for instance, and any penalties that a Storyteller might assign for such environments are waived. You may cast this Effect upon someone else, in which case its base duration is one minute/ conflict. **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success extends the duration by one grade, or allows you to cast the Effect upon one other person.

Jabarut (The Darwushiti Battle Trance) (••• Life, ••• Prime, ••• Time, • Correspondence)

The normally peaceful Darwushim are no strangers to the occasional necessity for violence, and this Rote gives them the ability to effectively fight hand to hand with almost any opponent. The dervish spins himself into a state of ecstasy and lets his mind become one with the Unity, turning himself into a living weapon.

System: Since using this Rote with fewer than 10 successes is almost pointless, its preparation is best done as an extended Effect. The dervish enters a trance and whirls for as many turns as he needs to build up enough successes. Once the sense of ecstasy overwhelms him, he's ready to enter into the fray, and when he enters combat, he's lethal.

The Prime Effect makes all of the mage's hand-to-hand damage aggravated.

Additional successes are split among three areas: Accuracy, attributes and actions.

Correspondence allows the dervish to know the exact whereabouts of his opponent and the exact relationship between his location and his opponent's. For each success channeled to accuracy, he receives a one-point break on the difficulty to attack the opponent.

The Life Sphere allows the dervish to incorporate the Better Body Rote into this one, thereby allowing him to boost his Attributes for the duration of the scene. Each success used for Attributes allows the Batini to increase his Strength, Dexterity, Endurance or Appearance by one point. If the mage is so inclined, he can also use the Life Sphere to grant him extra Health Levels at the rate of one extra Bruised level per two successes.

Time allows the mage to take extra actions. Each success channeled to actions lets the dervish take an additional action.

With the exception of Prime-enchanted hand-to-hand weapons, weapons may not be used with this Effect.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Life*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Prime*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Prime*, Apprentice (Basic) *Correspondence*. You whirl yourself into a frenzy and then strike with incredible accuracy and strength. For the next turn your unarmed strikes (or strikes with an enchanted weapon) cause aggravated damage. You gain a one-Trait bonus on the resolution of ties for the attacks (and you may count this for overbids), or you may make an extra attack. **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success grants one extra action, or one extra bonus Trait, or extends the duration by one grade.

Hajjaj (••• Correspondence, ••• Life, •• Mind, Optional •••• Time)

This technique has two very different uses.

The first afflicts a target at range with a subtle wasting illness. The target may notice that she's a little gaunt or a little pale, but won't attribute it to anything but lack of sleep or bad diet. The mage gains all health levels lost by the target. This is not a popular rote among the Batini — most of them, anyway — but, like other forms of assassination, it is considered a valid form of attack when one's opponent refuses to behave civilly.

A variant prevents a vampire from draining the mage's blood. As the vampire gains life from the Batini's

blood, it returns immediately to the mage's body. Should the vampire notice, he may beat the mage to death, but he won't get any blood, nor can he Embrace the mage.

System: Correspondence allows the mage to use the damaging Life attack at a distance. Adding the Mind component prevents the target from acknowledging that anything's wrong. The inclusion of the Time Sphere lets the mage hang the spell, so that it takes effect whenever he's bitten by a vampire, for that specific variant (though few Batini know how to perform the variant, given how rarely they interact with the undead). The Mind option also convinces the vampire that he is successfully drinking the mage's blood and leads him to believe that he has fed when he has not.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Correspondence*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Life*, Initiate (Basic) *Mind*, optional Adept (Intermediate) *Time*. You cause one target with whom you have an arcane connection to suffer one health level of lethal damage, if you win in a Mental Challenge. The subject doesn't realize that anything's wrong, instead attributing the damage to mundane sources. In addition, you heal one lethal or bashing level of damage; if you are fully healed, you gain one extra health level, which persists for one scene/hour. **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success allows you to test for one additional level of damage, which in turn gives you an additional health level. Note that if you spend your time wandering around killing random people so that you can have a dozen extra health levels, it's very likely that one of the few remaining powerful masters — or some creature that's attracted by this sort of extremely callous and damaging behavior — will show up to find out what's going on, and you won't like the results. The extra health levels are considered persistent magic and can be dispelled with countermagic.

Downward Spiral
(••• Mind, Optional •• Correspondence)

One of the more devastating attacks available to the Ahl-i-Batin, Downward Spiral is reserved for their most reviled enemies: Nephandi, Marauders and, lately, Technocrats.

By speaking a simple phrase that echoes in his target's mind, the Batini unleashes a gradually worsening storm of shame, insecurity and self-loathing that incapacitates, and possibly kills, her target.

System: Mind 3 lets the Subtle One catch a glimpse of her target's mindscape and take note of his fears, insecurities and character deficits. By formulating a phrase that captures the essence of those weaknesses and speaking it to her target in just the right tone of voice, the Batini triggers a cascade of traumas that run rampant through her target's psyche. The Subtle One amplifies the target's self-loathing and insecurity while simultaneously undermining his coping mechanisms, causing him to decompensate and, in very little time, breakdown completely.

Each success on an Arete roll cancels out a temporary Willpower point, but even if the player garners enough successes to erase the target's Willpower completely in a single roll, Willpower points disappear at the rate of one per turn and no faster. Thus, a mage who gets two successes the first turn, three successes the second turn and two successes the third turn against a target with a Willpower of 5 still has to press the attack for five turns before the target is out of Willpower.

If the Batini *does* press the attack and reduces his target's Willpower to zero, the target will, if he has the means to do so, eagerly take his own life, and probably in the least pleasant way possible. Targets who experience this emotional onslaught and live to tell about it are deeply shaken and lose a permanent Willpower point. They also develop a deep and abiding hatred for the mage who subjected them to such an attack and will do anything in their power to destroy her.

Remember that the victim may use permanent Willpower to resist this effect, so often the mage will need to build up the spell over successive turns of ritual. This, in turn, is dangerous as it means that the victim will often have an opportunity to counter-attack before the mage finishes the ritual.

If the mage is within conversational distance of the target, Mind 3 is all that is required. If the mage launches the attack from afar (speaking through a mirror, for example, or using long-range telepathy), she needs to perform the Rote as a conjunctional Effect with Correspondence 2.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Mind*, optional Initiate (Basic) *Correspondence*. You whisper a few words of loathing to your target (using *Correspondence* if you must do so at a distance) and make a Mental Challenge. If you win, the target loses one Willpower Trait. A victim who runs out of Willpower gains the Negative Traits: *Submissive x2* and the Derangement: *Depression* until at least one Willpower Trait returns. Said target also develops a strong hatred of the caster. Note that unless steps are taken to disguise your voice or otherwise make the attack's direction untraceable, the victim will likely take immediate steps to find and ruin you. **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success allows you to test for one additional Willpower Trait loss on a single casting. Note, however, that if you cast by extended ritual, the victim immediately becomes aware of your casting as soon as you begin, and may be able to disrupt the spell (say, by punching you).

Dowsing (•• Correspondence, •• Forces)

Living in the deserts where the Tradition originated has made the Ahl-i-Batin very adept at providing for themselves in harsh climates. By using a dowsing stick (or a pendulum or other similar device), the Batini locates water (or, more recently, oil) hidden beneath the sand and brings the substance to the surface where he can reach it. While this Rote may be used to find anything, it is only powerful enough to bring forth liquids and very fine powders from the sand. Gold, lost vehicles and archeological ruins can't be brought out from the sand this way.

System: Correspondence magic helps the mage discern the location of the substance and Forces magic brings it slowly bubbling up to the surface (or, more commonly with the Subtle Ones, brings it up to, but just beneath, the surface where the dowser kicks aside some sand to find the "hidden well," keeping everything coincidental).

MET: Initiate (Basic) *Correspondence*, Initiate (Basic) *Forces*. You follow the promptings of a stick, pendulum or other instrument (along with a Narrator) to a place where something of some value lies beneath the sand. Note that you don't always know what lurks beneath; you may get water, you may get a handful of pennies or you may get a bag of illicit narcotics. (Oops.) Successive uses of this Rote can result in the Domino Effect, causing Paradox as people watching stop believing in your "incredible luck." You can only find something that's located within your field of vision, though it might not be in sight — that is, something might be hidden underground but at the limit of your viewable range; anything further away is out of range. **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success allows you to remove one class of items from the list of possibilities: You could specify "No coins worth less than a dollar," "No water" or "No illegal items" in this fashion. You cannot use this as an exception *but* clause — i.e. no fair saying "Nothing but (some item)." Note that it's possible for you to exclude anything of value that's within your detection radius, or for you to simply be in an area where there isn't anything valuable.

Map the True Way (•• Correspondence, •• Matter or •• Prime)

When the mage wants to discover the whereabouts of a person, place or object, he prepares a piece of fine paper or a thin piece of animal hide, enters a trance and draws a map to that person, place or object.

Once the map is drawn, it stays accurate for the duration of the Effect. Even if the person, place or object moves, the map will continue to show the subject's current whereabouts, though the map will not update if it's being looked at (preventing excessive vulgarity). When the duration of the Effect expires, the map freezes showing the last position of the target item.

System: Correspondence magic grants the mage insight into the whereabouts of the desired item, which he then incorporates into the map. The ink, animated by the Matter Effect, moves around on the paper so that it constantly reflects the object's current position.

Note: The mage must have a rating of at least 2 in Crafts (Drawing or, ideally, Cartography) to use this Rote; otherwise the map is messy and unreadable.

Some Batini use a variant of this Rote to sense Nodes on the Web of Faith. If located at one Node of the Web, a Batini can sense the direction and distance to another Node. With an appropriate map, this shows the city where the Node resides. Most such Nodes are hidden by substantial countermagics and only a Batini's "keying" to the appropriate Prime signature allows slipping through that shroud. (Since the Batini have had years to layer this countermagic, any non-Batini trying to locate a Node on the Web from another point of the Web must defeat at least 15 successes worth of Warding magic.)

MET: Initiate (Basic) *Correspondence*, Initiate (Basic) *Matter* or Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You garner a map to a subject within 15 paces plus 3 paces per Arete Trait of yourself. Generally this is a rough line that snakes around major obstacles, but it won't necessarily avoid enemies or traps. The map updates subject to your concentration for up to one minute/ conflict. You must have Craft: Drawing, Drafting, Art or Cartography to use this Rote. Or, you combine your *Prime* knowledge of Batini magical keys and Resonance with your *Correspondence* knowledge to sense the nearest Node linked to your current one by the Web of Faith (assuming that the Node you're on is part of the Web.) **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success adds one multiplier to the maximum distance, or one grade to the duration. Or, for the *Prime* version, each success allows you to detect one additional Node linked on the Web of Faith to your current Node.

Ghayba (Occultation or "Unbeingness") (•••• Correspondence, •• Mind, •••• or ••••• Prime, ••• Spirit)

The Batini fancy themselves masters of stealth and misdirection. Not only do the Ahl-i-Batin have the inherent capacity to be hard to find, but also they, of all magi, have the ability to increasingly occult themselves until they become so Arcane that they are undetect-

able. This Rote, coveted and very closely guarded by the Batini, is the reason why. A Batini scholar in the 4th century noted that certain mages had an inherent tendency toward being hard to find (as manifested in the Arcane Background). After a great deal of study, this master, Ibrahim al-Qarim, isolated that element of a mage's magical nature that accounted for this tendency toward Arcane-ness and perfected it, calling it *Ghayba*, the Ritual of Occultation (or Unbeingness, as it is sometimes translated). By manipulating his own pattern with Spirit and Prime, a mage could implant a change in his very nature and how he and the Tellurian inter-related. Shaving off the hooks that the universe attaches to, increasingly took the mage out of the chain of cause and effect. While many Batini like the extra anonymity granted them by this rote, most use it only for periods of a year or two when they need the luxury of being impossible to find. Certain extremists, however, use Time magic to make the effects of Unbeingness permanent, and only the most powerful sensory magics have any hope of discovering their whereabouts. The Batini pride themselves on being the "Subtle Ones," and with this Effect they are capable of making themselves as subtle as they can stomach. Unbeingness has its own distinct disadvantages, however. At the upper levels of Arcane, the mage loses everything and everyone that was once his. The rigors of being one of the unnoticed are intense. Friends, family and lovers forget the Occulted one within moments, phones don't register the Occulted one's voice, and, most troubling of all, the universe itself sometimes forgets mages who make themselves too Arcane.

Many Batini use the Ritual of Occultation when Technocratic pursuit becomes too intense or when Nephandic enemies begin tightening their net.

System: The Spirit Effect allows the Subtle One to parlay with spirits of knowledge who guard information about the mage. Correspondence magic allows those spirits to be everywhere they're needed to cover up for the mage. The Prime Effect enchants the Batini's body, either temporarily or permanently, depending on which version of the Rote he's casting, and the Mind magic saturates the mage's now-enchanted Pattern with a subliminal impulse that says "He's not here. Pay no attention to him."

Each increment of Arcane requires two successes. The duration of this Rote is an exception to normal duration rules because the Effect enhances the mage's Avatar-given Arcane rating. Each success spent on duration causes the mage to be Occulted for one lunar year (about 336 days, about one month short of a solar year). Should the mage be *too* successful, he may need to put more successes than he had intended into duration to avoid exceeding the tenth degree of Arcane. If the mage reaches the eleventh or higher degree of Arcane, the Tellurian itself forgets him and he ceases to exist — *poof*, no more mage!

MET: Adept (Intermediate) *Correspondence*, Initiate (Basic) *Mind*, Adept (Intermediate) *Prime*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Spirit*. Ritual only. You alter your Pattern and your position within the Tellurian, causing yourself to become obscured from detection. You gain one additional Trait of Arcane for one year, although this can be removed with countermagic. Note that beyond five Traits of Arcane you cannot shed your Arcane rating. Unlike most Effects, you cannot end this one at will; it must run its course. **Grades of Success:** Each grade of success extends the duration by one year, or every two grades of success add another Arcane Trait. **You must cast this effect as a ritual.** You start with no grades of success and must build at least three (one for duration, two for a Trait of Arcane) to have any effect.

Taking Poison for the Enemy (•• Correspondence, •• Life, •• Matter)

Poisoning is a respected tradition among the *khilwati* of the Ahl-i-Batin, and one popular magical method of assassination honors the Unity while simultaneously neutralizing the Subtle One's enemy.

By meditating on the similarities between herself and her victim while taking poison, the mage makes the substance affect his enemy instead.

System: The combination of Correspondence, Matter and Life magic allows the Subtle One to apport poison she swallows from her pattern into her target's pattern when he swallows. Alternatively, a syringe in the Batini's arm full of, say, ammonia will deliver its lethal contents into her target's bloodstream instead. Assassins are fond of ammonia in this latter case because corpses generate ammonia as part of the decay process and, so long as the body isn't found for at least 12 hours, it leaves no indications of foul play. Be warned, though, that failure often leads to a painful death for the caster.

MET: Apprentice (Basic) *Correspondence*, Apprentice (Basic) *Life*, Apprentice (Basic) *Matter*. You drink or inject some sort of poison and then magically cause it to affect an enemy instead. Typically this is someone in your line-of-sight, although with an arcane connection you might be able to affect someone else. You must best the subject in a challenge of your Mental Traits versus his Physical Traits. If you win, the toxin enters his system; if you lose, it fails to transfer and you suffer its effects. **Grades of Success:** No effect.

Jebel Qaf

Perhaps the most ubiquitous legend regarding the Batini concerns Mount Qaf, the so-called homeland of the Tradition. While a Horizon Realm is far from a homeland, the manifestation of Mount Qaf does remain a distant inspiration.

To hear the Traditions tell it, Mount Qaf was an artifact of a now-defunct Tradition. According to the Batini, it served as a meeting place where the Traditions first gathered to agree on policy and the formulation of the foundation of the Council. The truth, naturally, is somewhere in between.

Mount Qaf had a physical manifestation up until the nineteenth century; allegorical tales assigned the formation of the mountain from the slaying of a mystical beast of tremendous size, and stated that Quintessence and possibility formed the base of the mountain while the roads up its side were the paths to Ascension and at its summit lay Unity. While perhaps whimsical, this metaphorical description suits well the path of Ascension itself, and so suited the whims of the Batini.

On the slopes of Mount Qaf rested the Sihr Maqamut, a tremendous Persian-style palace that the Batini used as their headquarters. When the Traditions first met to discuss the creation of the Web of Faith it was in the hallowed halls of Sihr Maqamut; Akashics, Hermetics and Choristers alike wondered at the beautiful geometry and luxurious carvings of the great palace, perched as it was on the lower precipices of the mountain. Above, from the roofless gardens in the midst of the Sihr Maqamut, one could see the rising mountain, symbolizing the path of Ascension.

As one passed out of Sihr Maqamut and up the slopes of the hill, it's said, one passed through stages of Ascension. While the mountain itself had a physical projection, it seemed that much of it functioned like a Shallowing — a place where mages could find themselves slipping into the Umbra by following paths up the side. Those who traveled higher often found small plateaus with strange trials; some mages claimed to see images of their Avatars beckoning from above, and the Batini claimed that at the top roosted the Oracles and the key to Ascension.

Of course, this point became moot in the nineteenth century, when the Technocracy demolished the Batini. Mount Qaf itself ceased to exist in a physical sense — "a great fire and smoke was seen and the mount threw itself down into rubble," related the words of one *khilwat* poet. Mages familiar with the ephemeral ways of the Umbra expected that the reflection of Jebel Qaf would remain in the Umbra; many Traditionalists had retreated already to Umbral strongholds in the Horizon Realms anyway. But that didn't happen. Instead, the mount simply ceased to be.

As the Batini Qutbs died or vanished, so too did Jebel Qaf disappear into the mists of history.

Not long after, the Virtual Adepts of the Technocracy pioneered a great spiritual space where all things were interconnected. Naturally, the Batini were quick to recognize the remnants of their old mountain; whether couched as a great slope or as a tremendous lattice of information, the mountain's allegorical climb to Ascension, and its many paths, layers and hidden byways, provoked eerie familiarity among the few Batini who saw the Web. But the remaining *khilwats* bided their time.

Today, Jebel Qaf is an allegorical memory: A tale from the early days of the Batini. Yet it's said that several Virtual Adepts have recalled encountering a strange bright mountain in their Digital Web, a sector that had never before been known. Upon this slope rested a ruined library, where a sphinx guarded lost knowledge and refused entry to those who could not answer her whimsical riddles.

The Batini haven't yet returned to the mountain... but when they do they may, perhaps, hold secret byways to the Digital Web that are unknown even to the Virtual Adepts.

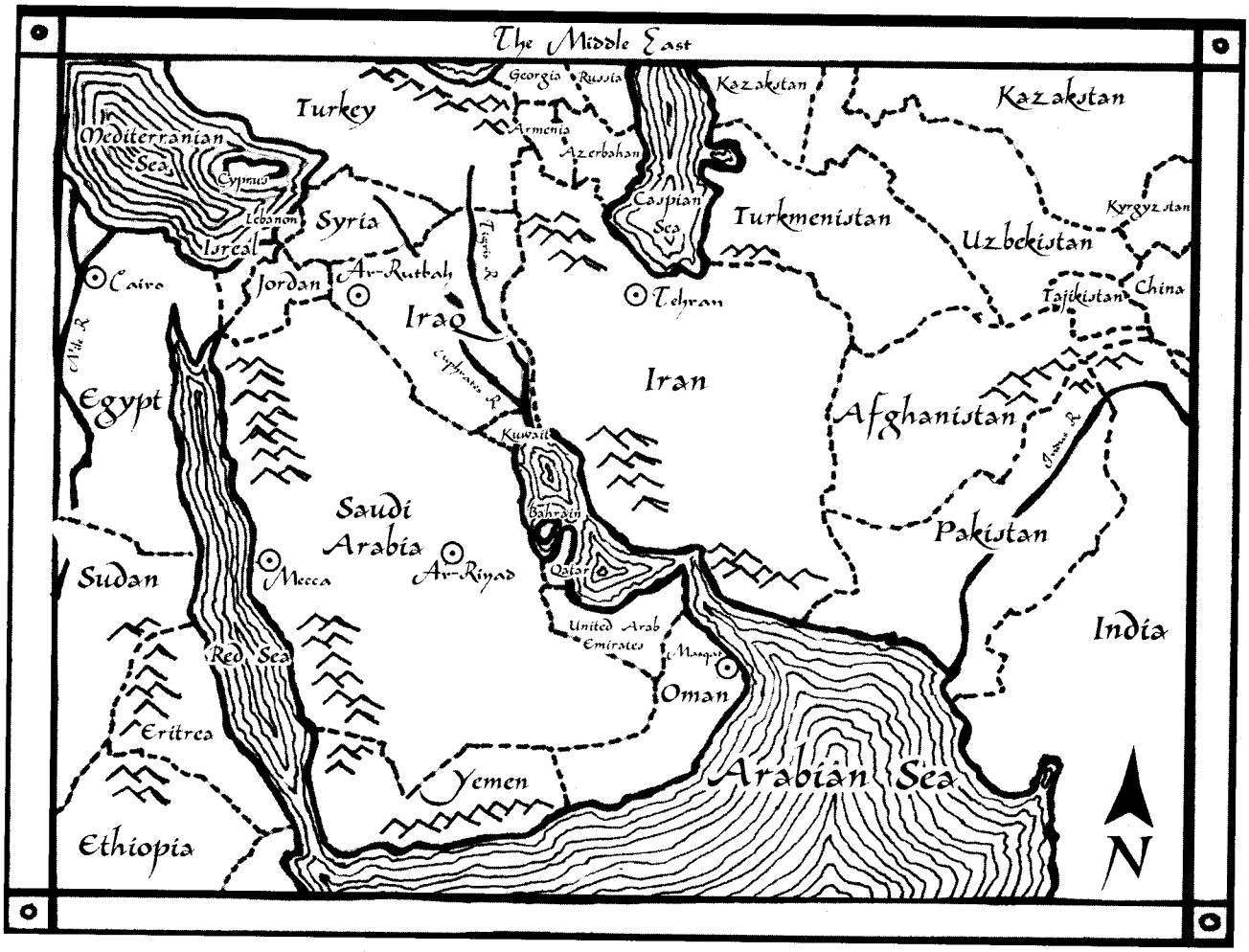
Playing Around on the Mountainside

What does all of this mean for your game? Mount Qaf is gone; but, then again, the physical slope itself was never important. The allegorical shape, the climb to enlightenment, remains reflected in the Digital Web, which might perhaps be cut from the very Tapestry of the Jebel Qaf.

The Batini have not yet returned to the mountain to claim their lost knowledge. Indeed, none know the origin of the sphinx that resides there; be it an Avatar, a spirit of knowledge, a Bygone or something *else*, even the Batini can't say. Doubtless to gain entry one must answer her riddles and well. And, of course, the sphinx is less than kind to those who fail to amuse her.

The Web of Faith

Perhaps the most well-known and lasting achievement of the Batini remains the so-called Web of Faith. During the early years of the Tradition (as it's told), the Batini undertook the construction of great underground reservoirs and aqueducts, called *qanats*, which moved fresh water from the mountains to cities far away. The clever construction, pressure differential and magical augmentation allowed these *qanats* to create streams and fountains in cities residing in otherwise harsh



desert. Dry cities like Giza and Riyadh could benefit from this flow of life-giving water, even growing lush gardens and tranquil greenhouses.

More importantly, though, the Batini could use these channels to transfer Quintessence. By imbuing Quintessence into the streams of water through the mechanisms of the *qanats*, the Batini could gift cities with the life-giving energy. Batini mages had only to find the small oases and gardens in the midst of a desert city to know that a reservoir of Quintessence waited beneath, ready to tap at need. The network of Quintessence allowed cities to infuse the energies of their own Resonance into the flow, then spread it throughout all of the other cities on the network, creating a feeling of tranquil Unity that gave each city a font of holiness and an inspiration that, perhaps, a few other places on the world were as brothers to it.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Batini network suffered tremendous damage, partly due to neglect, partly to twisted Resonance and partly to conquest. The Celestial Chorus' growing Inquisition hounded Batini steps and, worst of all, djinn and Marauders roamed across the darkened landscape of a continent consumed by turmoil.

To counter the effects of the devastation wrought across Europe and the Middle East, the Batini proposed a strengthening of their initial Web, using it to connect powerful Nodes not only as conduits for Quintessence but also as centers of faith for the most profound and promising places where Sleepers gathered to express love, joy and hope. Accounts tell that a coalition of Akashic Walkers, Celestial Inquisitors and Hermetic magi met in Isfahan to hotly debate a plan for the proposed Batini Web of Faith. Unaware at first that the Batini had covertly fostered this plan, the Traditions agreed to put aside their quarrelling in the interests of a greater human endeavor. Thus was both the Web of Faith: The power of raw human prayer channeled Quintessential energy across the landscape, and messengers of every denomination carried not only letters and documents but also Tass for the Web. Reinforced with the ancient *qanat* systems, the Web created a tremendous net of power that gave Tradition and Batini mages the ability to ensnare and banish the djinn

and Marauders that threatened the area. While the Web of Faith remained strongest around Persia and the various Arab states, some parts of its influence spread as far as China and England.

Over time, the Resonance and Quintessence of the Web spread not only throughout the Middle East and parts of Europe, but seeped into the very ground. There it pooled in deep collections of energy. This, unfortunately, proved disastrous: The later Technocracy detected these pools of latent energy, labeling them as rich reservoirs of oil. While in many cases the Batini quickly adapted and managed to lay claim to these oil fields, the damage had been done: The Technocracy learned to locate places where the Batini Web of Faith concentrated energy, and intruded with all the force of its budding world economy. Cities strong in tradition and faith became spectacles of modern engineering as poor citizens garnered wealth overnight by parlaying their lands into fields of oil rigging and pumps. Refineries blossomed, and to deal with the sudden wealth, national governments took on new roles of importance. Not only did the Technocracy manage to infiltrate its beliefs into the ancient ways, but the very power sources of the Batini were co-opted as well.

By the modern era the Batini withdrew completely from the Tradition Council, which steadfastly ignored their requests for assistance in defense of the Web against the Technocracy. It was from this point that the Batini truly became subtle and vanished from sight of mages as well as men.

Many major sites on the Web of Faith were overrun and turned to Technocratic use, but this did not destroy their power; the Technocracy replaced fountains with oil wells and *qanats* with pipelines. Still, the drastic changes in Resonance, coupled with Batini magics to conceal their remaining sites, meant that the links were changed or broken. No longer could a Batini use the Web as a resource to communicate with any city on the network; now only a few minor points remained for Batini use, with the rest under the umbrella of the Technocracy.

Ar Rutbah, in Iran, is perhaps the last major site still primarily under Batini influence. Unfortunately, due to travel sanctions from the US-UN coalition and continuing Iraqi unrest, the city itself is denuded and difficult to visit. Occulted Batini can, of course, easily sneak through controlled areas, but more mundane or recently-Awakened mages may have difficulty attaining proper travel papers and surviving the rigors of Iraq's damaged infrastructure.

Some other minor towns still have connections on the Web of Faith. The currently extant Web extends through Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Yemen, Omar, Syria, Kuwait, Israel and Lebanon. (Persistent rumors hint at a locale in Turkey, but if there is or was one, it is either lost or co-opted.) In a very real way, the Web indicates the boundaries of Batini power and influence: Because of its importance the Web draws Batini, who work within its borders to promote their own interests in a self-feeding cycle.

Each Node on the Web once had an impressive amount of power, but in this age many have ebbed through neglect or misuse. Typically, a small site on the periphery of the Web may have a one-point Node — a knowledgeable Batini might be able to find such a site in nearly any rustic hamlet on the outskirts of civilization. The more important and potent the Node, the more difficult it is to conceal, and thus the more likely it was to be co-opted by the Technocracy. For this reason, Nodes over the three-point range are either no longer under Batini control or else heavily shrouded by special magic to avoid detection. Fortunately, a Batini at one of the Nodes can use its Quintessence stream to send missives to other Nodes, and even gather an idea of routes to follow from Node to Node, analogous to the way that a computer programmer might trace through various sites on the Internet. Because of careful Batini shrouding, Occultation and erasure of strong Resonance, most such Nodes remain undetectable to those who don't know the magical formulae necessary to seek them; thus, a single point on the Node is of limited use to an invader, but is a powerful strategic point to a properly-schooled Batini mage.

Personages

Discussing important Ahl-i-Batin personages is a bit specious — just as their early Tradition representative, Ali-ben-shaar, spoke for a hidden group of Masters, so too do those who stand out do so only because they have not achieved the Occultation of even greater figures. The greatest of Batini are forgotten to the Tellurian, and their histories may never be known. So it is that those best known among the Subtle Ones are, ironically, those who have somehow failed to uphold their Tradition's standard, and yet have simultaneously achieved great strides for the Batini. But then again, aren't heroes (and pariahs) made of just such exceptions?



Miriam ben-Hamida

The presiding murshid of the University of Light appears to be in her early fifties, but she's actually a bit over one hundred.

Born in Turkey at the end of the nineteenth century, ben-Hamida was a progeny at everything she took an interest in. In part, her academic excellence was her way of ignoring her parent's opium addiction. Her parents remained in the opium dens of Istanbul throughout her adolescence and barely noticed when she was gone.

Ben-Hamida left her homeland for Germany, a country with a much more active cultural and intellectual scene. She was fascinated by the conversations of the Germans, and she eavesdropped as a way of increasing her familiarity with the language. In addition to German, she also heard a great deal of Yiddish, the language of the European Jews.

As with anything she took an interest in, ben-Hamida learned Yiddish, and Hebrew a year later. Her interest in Jewish culture led her to the Kaballah and to a man who taught it to her, Dov Cotovsky.

When World War I broke out, she and Dov got married and moved to Jerusalem where his family lived. It was then that he began teaching her the real power of the Kaballah.

One night Dov (at the request of a Qutb) sat down next to Miriam and confided that he was a member of a magical Order called the University of Light that studied the Kabbalah. Miriam was delighted, and within no time, she was applying her keen mind to the study of the Kaballah full time. She Awakened less than a year later and was invited to be an Ahl-i-Batin initiate at the University of Light.

Her husband Dov was her dearest friend and constant companion until 1944 when, without warning, he went *barabbi*. An Adept of Spirit at the time, ben-Hamida saw perfectly well that something had changed within her husband. With the Qutbs having recently gone into hiding, Miriam was faced with the prospect of dealing with the situation herself.

She knew the Batini protocol for dealing with *barabbi*. In textbook Batini fashion, ben-Hamida arranged for her husband's assassination and his fiftieth birthday celebration at the same time and never let on that anything was wrong.

While she arranged for her husband's assassination, she would not be there for it. When the deed was done, she immediately went in and began the highly complex Kabbalistic ritual to redeem her husband's Avatar. The ritual had taken days to research and took just under two solid days to perform. It was performing that ritual that granted her the understanding to become a Master of the Spirit Sphere.

Ben-Hamida became the presiding murshid of the University of Light in 1973 when Solomon ben-Maimon died, because there was no one else there qualified to do it. Without the governance of the Qutbs, succession automatically went to the most knowledgeable. That was Miriam.

Ben-Hamida has worked since then to increase the *khanate's* following of helpful, if abstract, spiritual guardians. Various angels, demons and spirits of confusion, mystery, misdirection, inattentiveness and blindness are bound around the periphery of the small "campus," to maintain its secrecy.

Ben-Hamida, spirits buoyed by the return of the Qutbs (on whatever limited scale), has taken on several new initiates in the last decade, and has become, if anything, a more rigorous instructor of the Kabbalistic texts. To her way of thinking, the Ahl-i-Batin can only survive if their level of excellence and intellectual rigor surpasses that of the Technocracy. For the first time since her husband's death, Miriam ben-Hamida finds herself optimistic about the future.

Ustad Akhdir Jabal

The Paradise Garden of Isfahan was, for centuries, led by the Murshid Ustad Akhdir Jabal. Not only was he by all accounts a kind man, an accomplished musician, a skilled Master of the Mind and Correspondence Spheres and a mentor to *hundreds* of Ahl-i-Batin, he was also a *Qutb*.

When the Technocracy began tightening its grip on the Middle East, the *qutbs*, in effect the main nodes of the Batini's telepathic communication network, were the first casualties. Many of the other Qutbs went into hiding after the first wave of assassinations, but Jabal felt his position as Qutb obligated him to maintain the Batini's network of minds as long possible in order to send news of the latest Batini casualties, warnings to targeted *zawiyahs*, and information on Technocratic activity throughout the Middle East. For that, he was listed as Enemy #1 among the Technocrats of the Middle East.

Jabal sensed — and, for as long as possible, warded off — the Technocracy's increasingly persistent attempts to track him down, but even Masters of Mind and Correspondence need to sleep eventually. Jabal misdirected the Technocracy again and again, leading them to decoy sites as far afield as Morocco and Kashmir but at the end, he was forced to flee the Paradise Garden in order to maintain its secrecy. When he finally allowed his persecutors to find him, it was on the Greek isle of Delos, far from the *khanate* he had taught in for so long. Jabal's last act of misdirection was to make sure that the amalgam of Gray Men and Men in White that had been sent to apprehend and interrogate him never noticed the hundreds of barrels filled with alchemically derived explosives. Jabal was killed instantly, but the losses to the Technocracy were staggering.

It was to avenge Jabal's noble death that the Paradise Garden subsequently became a training center for *khilwati*.

Aziz Akhtar

Teacher, mystic, fanatic, lover, hermit, assassin, poet and saint all describe aspects of the head instructor of the Ikwhan at-Tawhid. None of those terms, however, suggest Akhtar's true lethality. As the presiding murshid of the *khanate* that trains sacred assassins, Akhtar has skills that make him one of the most dangerous individuals to walk the planet. He is a Master of Correspondence, Life and Mind, but his warmth, humility and devotion to *zuhd* lead those who are making his acquaintance for the first time to believe that he is sadly out of place in such a conflict-oriented *khanate*. They are wrong. Akhtar simply practices putting others at ease as he would practice any of the other arts of assassination. (Manipulation of others is such a part of Akhtar's existence that he frequently forgets that he's doing it.)

Though he doesn't look a day over thirty, Akhtar is almost two hundred years old and clearly — and fondly — remembers the time before the Technocracy had conquered the Middle East. His body is as strong, fast and fit as any Olympic athlete's and his mind is as sharp as a human's can be (without gaining permanent Paradox, anyway).



As an instructor, Akhtar is extremely demanding of the initiates he trains. He insists on perfection. Sloppy thinking and weak flesh have destroyed more mages than any other hazard, and he will not settle for those kinds of results from his students. While Akhtar never states that he wants his students to use Life and Mind magics to perfect their bodies the way he has perfected his own, he sets a very deliberate example by his actions, and lets slip remarks about certain "advanced training methods" that might benefit an individual who was serious about the ascetic life. In this particular instance, he's not particularly subtle. The young Brethren of the Unified Soul who follow him gradually begin to compete with one another to see who can achieve better results faster. Eventually, every *mutasawwif* who becomes a murid under Akhtar's tutelage takes himself far above the levels of excellence normally achieved by the masses.

Aziz Akhtar has not personally participated in an assassination since 1992 when he slew a Nephandic Gilledian who had assumed his face in an attempt to lure a number of young initiates into a Caul. With the recent resurgence of the Ahl-i-Batin, however, he hopes soon to find himself moving against a number of high-ranking agents of the Technocracy.

Günther Osterimann

The son of a German engineer and a Turkish professor of psychology, Gunter grew up in Cologne

and studied advanced mathematics at the University of Basel in Switzerland.

While trying to discern how a more workable version of the square root of negative 1 might be formulated, Ostermann Awakened and his Avatar, one of those touched by the Khwaja al-Akbar, presented itself as a very complex formula out of domain theory, the solution to which lay hidden in the Middle East.

After he graduated in the spring of 1992, Ostermann took a vacation to Saudi Arabia. In Mecca, he met a charismatic Spanish count named Louro Razaiz. The two talked about mathematics, mysticism and psychology over lunch and agreed to meet again the next day, when they agreed to do the same thing. One day of conversation stretched into another stretched into another. After weeks of spending most of their waking hours together, Count Razaiz confided that he was neither Spanish, nor a count, and that he was actually something of a mystic. Ostermann (quite skilled in the Mind arts) confided in return that he was perfectly aware of all of that, and the two of them went to the Ikwhan at-Tawhid where Ostermann began his training. The man he knew as Count Razaiz was actually three different Ahl-i-Batin practicing their impersonation abilities.

Ostermann studied at the *khanate* for two years where he distinguished himself through his rapid comprehension of the Unity. Leaving Arabia, he lived as part of a *jama'a* in Turkey for five years where his achievement of Adept status in the Sphere of Correspondence prompted his initiation as a murshid.

Ostermann is now among the most active non-Arab Taftâni in the world. He frequently operates as a



khilwat for the Batini, neutralizing Technocrats where he's instructed to, though he doesn't like to do so.

Mono-Traditional Games

The wide range of ascetics, mystics, fanatics, and assassins in the Ahl-i-Batin combined with the Batini sense of discipline and Unity make mono-traditional games a simple and interesting matter.

One of the new Qutbs could gather the Subtle Ones from different *khanates* (or wherever they were) and require them to work together for some end that would serve the Tradition. Alternatively, the cabal could be members of a *jama'a* who already act in unison. Because of Batini subtlety, chances are that each member of the cabal has some agenda that's hidden from everyone else. Indeed, unlike most cabals where camaraderie grows with time, a Batini cabal has a distinct chance to erode as its members become more enshrouded, and as their little secrets strain relations with one another. Far from being a problem, though, this offers many role-play opportunities; Batini might try to "feel each other out," learning secrets about one another, only to lead to the resentment of their cabal-mates. Similarly, they may suspect one of their number of secretly abetting the Nephandi, something that requires a great deal of investigation — so who can out-subtle the others?

Batini cabals rarely have a "leader," unlike groups from many other Traditions; as a result, dealing with a Batini cabal is an exercise in frustration for many outsiders. Often, an individual simply steps up to deal with a problem at hand based on expertise. If a given problem involves, say, computer hacking, the Batini most skilled with computers takes the lead; then, the militaristically-trained Batini steps up when the assassination and terrorism rears its head. To the Batini, this is just practicality in action — allow the most competent to take the reins and direct the group in times of strife.

In an all-Batini game, you have the usual option of playing a settled cabal or a mobile one; unlike other groups, though, even the settled cabal will probably have only a limited repertoire of contacts and allies due to Batini Occultation. Indeed, where other mages would see the establishment of various buildings, businesses or schools as a success, the Batini might only view their works as promising if the cabal *increased* its distance from the community. This is, perhaps, one reason why the Batini are less successful in their goals than the other Traditions; by alienating themselves from the Masses the Batini eschew the ability to change human thoughts and beliefs. The all-Batini cabal must find a way to make a place for itself, to spread its outlook and

to train new members all while evading authoritarian notice and attachments to excessive worldliness.

Legends

Sihr Maqamut

Low on the fabled slopes of Jebel Qaf, it is said, the greatest of the Ahl-i-Batin Horizon Realms existed, an infinitely delightful garden where the Awakened could discuss abstract and highly complex concepts without the mental background noise of Sleepers distracting them.

It was within the walls of Sirh Maqamut that the Ahl-i-Batin held the meetings that led to their joining the nascent Council of the Nine in 1466.

Not only do the Murshids maintain that Sihr Maqamut still exists on the slopes of Jebel Qaf, they say that a number of Qutbs remain trapped there, discussing points of highly complex doctrine, until Jebel Qaf is located and freed again.

Al-Khidr "The Green One"

A mysterious figure thought to be an Oracle of Time who oversees blessings, protection and the mystical initiation of those becoming murshids. Some Batini suggest that Al-Khidr is to the Sphere of Time what the Khwaja al-Akbar is to the Sphere of Correspondence.

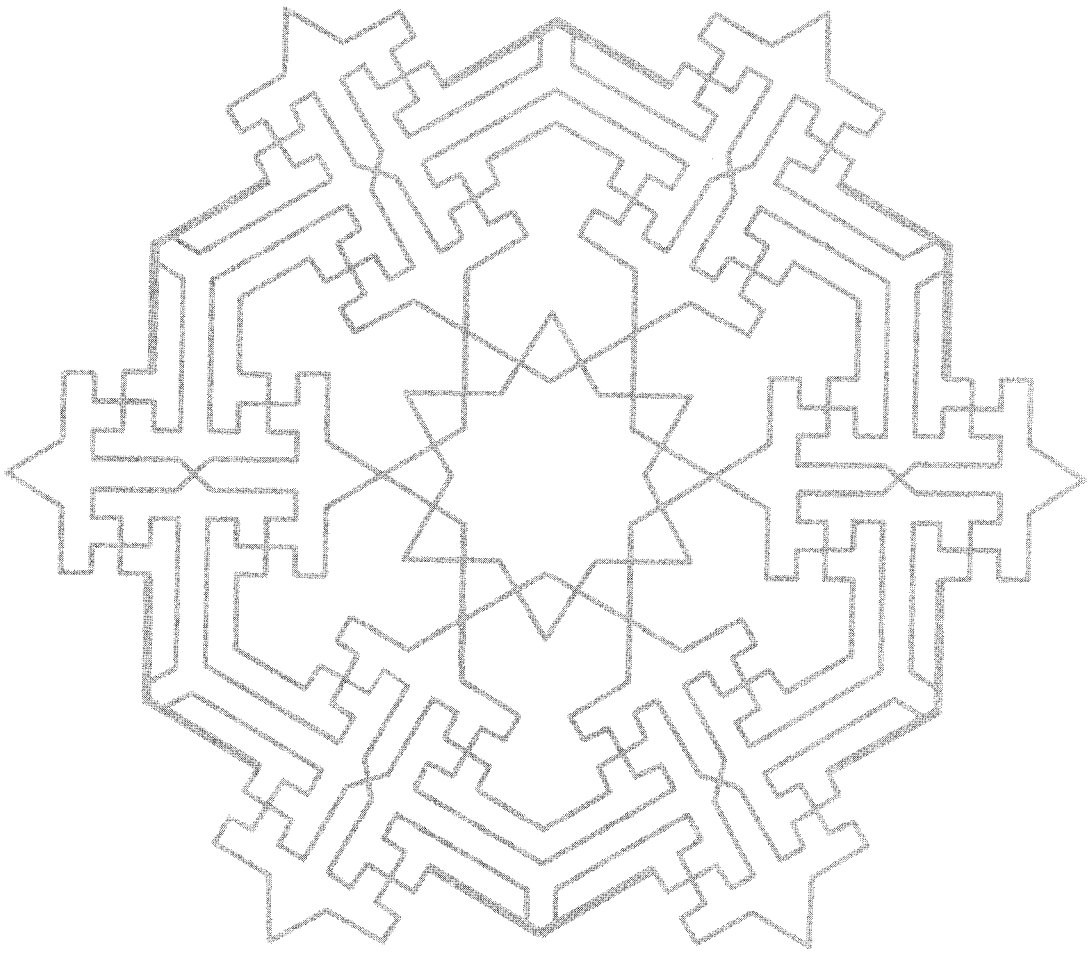
Khwaja al-Akbar

The chief spirit entity of the Ahl-i-Batin, the Khwaja al-Akbar is the agent through which the Doctrine of Unity was delivered. It is believed that for the brief moment of his existence, he was an Oracle of Correspondence.

Nazdhur-I-Khan

The Nazdhur-I-Khan is believed to be an Oracle of Mind. He commonly appears in Batini legend as a seeming madman, but once the subject of the story understands the Oracle's wise and brilliant reasoning, he sees the Oracle's correctness and begins, himself, acting "mad."

Many didactic stories in Batini legend feature the Nazdhur-I-Khan, who features commonly as something of a trickster figure reminding the Subtle Ones not to become so subtle that they lose their mental flexibility.



Loose Cannon

Quote: *Forgive me.*

Prelude: You were born lucky. You thought your parents were the most brilliant people on the planet. Your mother was a professor at the University of Cairo and your father was a mystic and an architect. You were a precocious child, and their studies fascinated you so much that you'd much rather stay at home and talk with them than go play with other children.

As it turns out, your parents were a bit *too* interesting, at least to the powers in control. You were home the day the Men in Black came to your house. While you still don't remember exactly what happened that day, you *do* remember that when that day was over, you were living in an orphanage, and the kinds of things you used to discuss with your parents were no longer considered appropriate topics of conversation.

You suffered with the anti-intellectual rabble in the orphanage for two years before you couldn't stand it any more. You felt that something within you was being systematically starved to death, and so, at the age of fifteen, you left.

Over the course of a year, you had a number of small adventures and did a number of unusual things, some of which you found exciting, others you found distasteful. Everything you did seemed to lead you in one direction, and at the end of a year, you found yourself in Mecca.

You were in the souks one day buying a chicken for dinner when a bright-eyed man called you over and started chatting with you cordially. You became friends, and over the course of several weeks, he started talking to you about some of those things your parents had once spoken about. The hairs on the back of your neck stood on end. When you were able to discuss those things in turn without sounding ignorant, he informed you that you were one of the Children of the Unity and asked if you were willing to learn more. You said yes.

Over the course of the next week, he asked you a series of progressively more difficult riddles, and by the seventh day, you had Awakened. Within a week you were in the desert learning incredibly complex techniques for training your mind and body.

Concept: The training at Ikhwan at-Tawhid was insanely difficult, but the murshid, Aziz Akhtar, was adamant that hard training was the crucible that would bring you closer to the Unity and to perfection. You saw the other initiates and marveled at their intellect, strength and good looks. You vowed to do whatever it took to attain that level of perfection.

You pursued your training with a fanaticism for self-mastery that overshadowed every other aspect of your life. Aziz Akhtar spoke with you one evening, explaining that you were losing track of the point of the training. To give you something to think about besides training, he sent you to perform some simple business for the *khanate* and you haven't returned since, hoping to return to the Ikhwan at-Tawhid shaped by your personal training regimen into one of the perfect ones like Aziz.

In the interim, you are out in the real world using the techniques you learned at the *khanate*. You fancy yourself a Subtle One and try to comport yourself appropriately, but your training was far from done, and you're a little uncertain as to what you should be doing. So far, though, you've taken out several agents of the Technocracy—at least you *think* they were agents of the Technocracy.

Roleplaying Tips: Smile warmly to those around you. Make friends out of strangers. When the time comes to neutralize an enemy, make it as quick and painless as possible. Any time you are not involved in neutralizing an enemy of the Ahl-i-Batin, push yourself to your limits to achieve the level of perfection that you know you can and must attain.

Magic: There is no blade as sharp as subtlety, and you wield subtlety with a deft touch. Subtle Mind Effects make others like you, trust you, even love you; one kind word from you they are happy to tell you everything they know. Correspondence allows you to know where your target is at any given moment, and allows you to extend your hand out to them even if they are far away, hidden, or locked behind thick doors. Life magic used on yourself allows you to look like anyone and allows your body to go places (underwater for extended periods, through a hole only four inches wide) that it couldn't otherwise go, and when used on others... it's best to think of it this way: if your enemies should die unexpectedly in their sleep from stroke, sudden heart attack or complete respiratory failure — and it's amazing how often they do — can anyone really say that it *wasn't* an act of nature?

Equipment: Hemlock powder, silk scarf

MAGE
THE ASCENSION

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Thrill-Seeker
Essence: Primordial
Demeanor: Bon Vivant
Craft: Ahl-i-Batin
Concept: Loose Cannon
Faction: Ikhwan at-Tawhid

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●OO	Charisma	●●●●O	Perception	●●●OO
Dexterity	●●●OO	Manipulation	●●●●O	Intelligence	●●OOO
Stamina	●●OOO	Appearance	●●●OO	Wits	●●OOO

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●OO	Crafts	OOOOO	Academics	●OOOO
Athletics	OOOOO	Drive	●OOOO	Computer	OOOOO
Awareness	OOOOO	Etiquette	OOOOO	Cosmology	OOOOO
Brawl	●●OOO	Firearms	●OOOO	Enigmas	●●OOO
Dodge	●●●OO	Meditation	OOOOO	Investigation	OOOOO
Expression	OOOOO	Melee	●●●OO	Law	OOOOO
Intimidation	●●OOO	Performance	OOOOO	Linguistics	●OOOO
Leadership	OOOOO	Stealth	●●●OO	Medicine	OOOOO
Streetwise	●●●OO	Survival	●●OOO	Occult	●OOOO
Subterfuge	OOOOO	Technology	OOOOO	Science	OOOOO

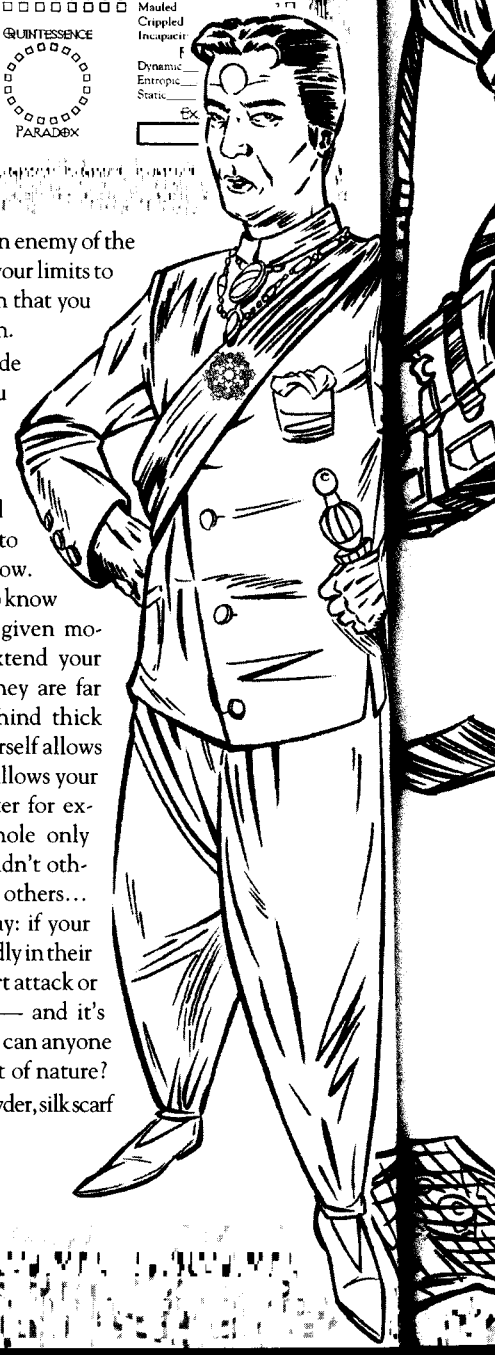
Spheres

Correspondence	●●●OO	Life	●●●OO	Prime	OOOOO
Entropy	OOOOO	Matter	OOOOO	Spirit	OOOOO
Forces	OOOOO	Mind	OOOOO	Time	OOOOO

Advantages

Backgrounds: Arcane ●●●●O; Destiny ●OOOO; Mentor ●OOOO; Resources ●●OOO; OOOOO
Arete: ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Willpower: ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Quintessence
Paradox
Merits/Flaws

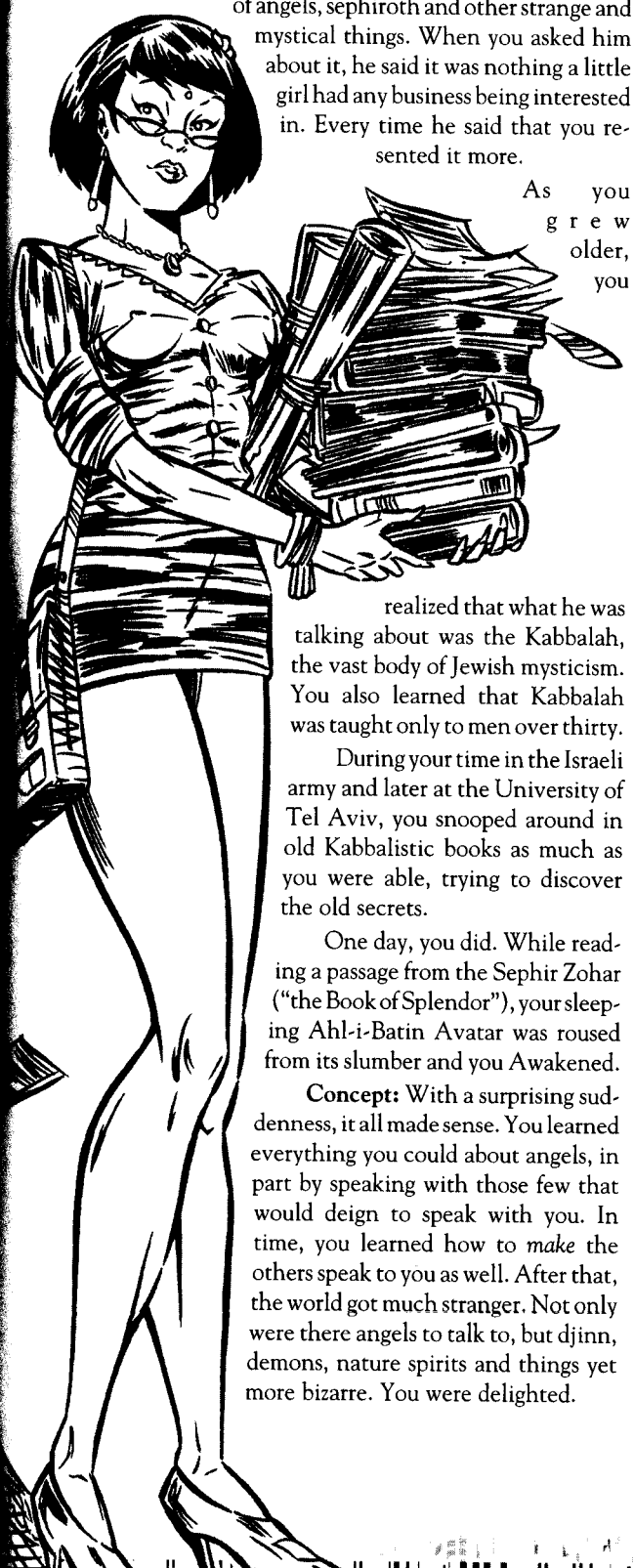
Health: Bruised -0; Hurt -1; Injured -1; Wounded -2; Mauled; Crippled; Incapacit
Dynamic
Entropic
Static
Ex



University of Light Kabbalist

Quote: *One of the archangels of punishment is standing right behind you. His name is Kezef. If you call me a "stupid chick" again, I'll have him kick your ass.*

Prelude: You grew up in Israel and your father was a conservative rabbi. From time to time you heard him speaking of angels, sephiroth and other strange and mystical things. When you asked him about it, he said it was nothing a little girl had any business being interested in. Every time he said that you resented it more.



As you grew older, you realized that what he was talking about was the Kabbalah, the vast body of Jewish mysticism. You also learned that Kabbalah was taught only to men over thirty.

During your time in the Israeli army and later at the University of Tel Aviv, you snooped around in old Kabbalistic books as much as you were able, trying to discover the old secrets.

One day, you did. While reading a passage from the Sephir Zohar ("the Book of Splendor"), your sleeping Ahl-i-Batin Avatar was roused from its slumber and you Awakened.

Concept: With a surprising suddenness, it all made sense. You learned everything you could about angels, in part by speaking with those few that would deign to speak with you. In time, you learned how to *make* the others speak to you as well. After that, the world got much stranger. Not only were there angels to talk to, but djinn, demons, nature spirits and things yet more bizarre. You were delighted.

MAGE
THE ASCENSION

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Perfectionist
Essence: Pattern
Deitheanor: Traditionalist
Craft: Ahl-i-Batin
Concept: Kabbalist
Faction: University of Light

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception (Insightful)	●●●●○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence (Calculating)	●●●●○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Crafts	●○○○○	Academics (Literature)	●●●●○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	●●○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Cosmology	●●○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●●○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Leadership	●●○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	●●●○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○	Technology	●○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	●●○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	○○○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	●●○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	●●○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	
Arcane	●○○○○
Avatar	●●○○○
Library	●●○○○
Resources	●●○○○
	○○○○○

Arete: ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower: ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

Health

Bruised	-0 □
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

Merits/Flaws

Quintessence

Paradox

Resonance

Dynamic	○○○○○
Entropic	○○○○○
Static (Numbered)	●○○○○

Experience

Others were less so. Dimensional Scientists in Tel Aviv noted a pronounced increase in extra-dimensional activity. That was you. They decided you needed to be taught a lesson, and you barely survived the lesson alive. But survive you did. You were willing to give up magic altogether, in fact, until representatives from the University of Light met with you and asked you to become one of the Subtle Ones. You weren't sure how subtle you were, but you welcomed the chance to practice magic and learn new techniques

Roleplaying Tips: Your magic may be subtle, but you're a little less subtle than your co-Traditionalists would like for you to be. While you were reared in a conservative household, you also grew up in Israel, where the gender disparity is far less prevalent than it is in other Middle Eastern countries. Any hint of sexism is likely to piss you off.

That said, your dedication to studying the Kabbalah is absolute. So far as you're concerned, knowledge is power, literally and figuratively.

Magic: Most of your magic consists of reciting Hebrew and Enochian formulae that allow you to speak with angels and other spirits. From them you have learned much, much more about the nature of the Tellurian than you ever thought possible. With the knowledge they've provided, you've learned how to extend your awareness to increasingly distant and strange areas of the world of Spirits. In time, it is your wish to visit these strange places in person. In the interim, you're content to seek out the Shekinah, the feminine aspect of YHVH.

Equipment: Books, scrolls, Apple iMac

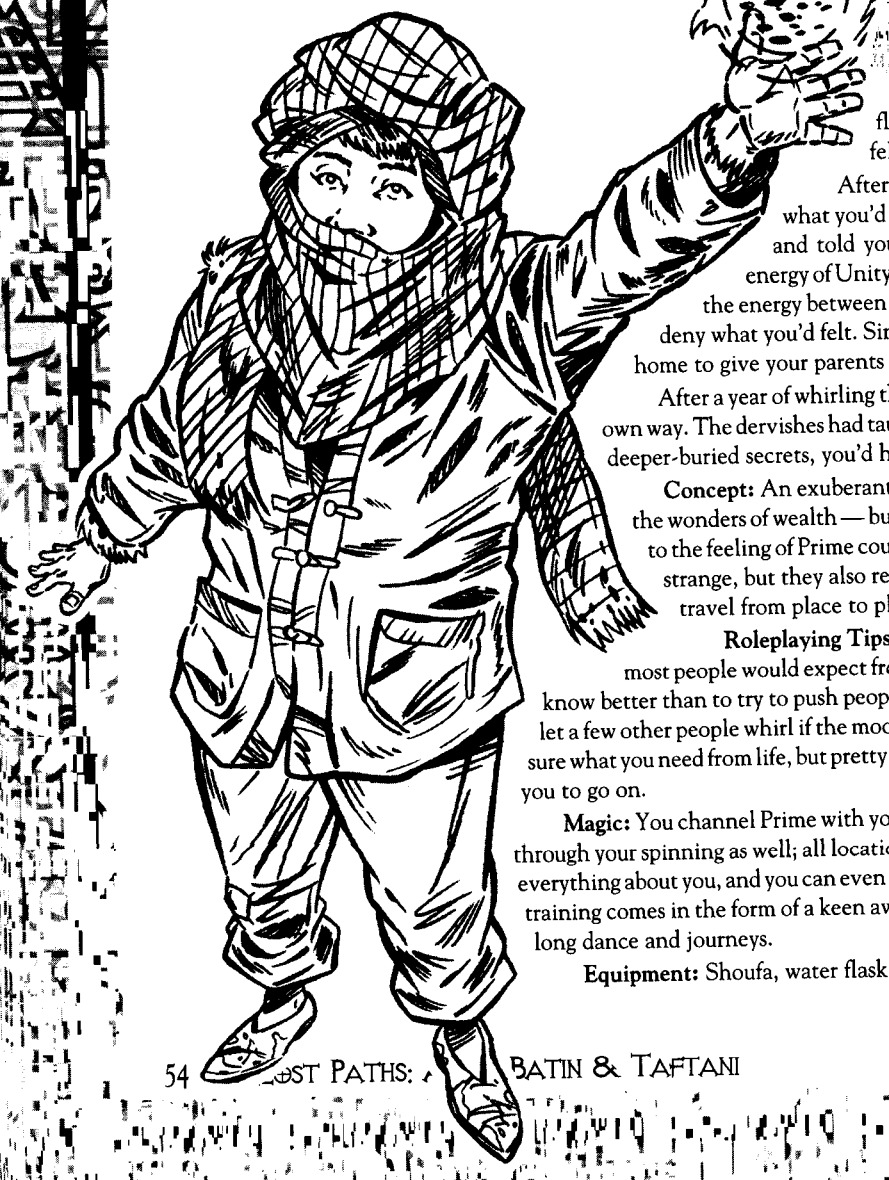
Whirling Dervish

Quote: *Dance until everything spins together into Unity!*

Prelude: On the hard streets, begging is a way of life. Some beggars make a habit of demanding alms — baksheesh — for simple services, such as opening doors or wiping windows. You were one such. After all, in a family with fourteen siblings in the heart of Baghdad, you had to make a living any way you could!

One day while our begging (and looking for the occasional bit to pilfer) you watched a party of whirling dervishes. Garbed only in simple, loose clothes, the dervishes spun like tops to the beat of a mesmerizing drum. One hand stretched up to the sky and the other reached to the ground. More subtly still, the dervishes slowly worked about in a circling, intertwining pattern. Occasionally a passerby would give the musicians a few coins in an alms-box, but the dervishes never stopped or applauded or changed their course.

Suddenly, drawn by inspiration, you stepped into the dance. You whirled like a top, one arm high, one low. You just knew there was an opening that you had to fill! As you whirled and whirled in tight circles inside of larger circles, you felt an electric energy course through your body. It seemed as if Allah himself had alighted his finger upon you; the very grace of heaven seemed to flow down from the sky and into the Earth beneath you. You felt like a lightning rod in motion.



MAGE
THE ASCENSION

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Child
Essence: Dynamic
Deitheanor: Visionary
Craft: Ahl-i-Batin
Concept: Whirling Dervish
Faction: Darwushim

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity Quick	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina Tireless	●●●●○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics Endurance	●●●●○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	●●○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○	Cosmology	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	●○○○○
Dodge	●●●○○	Meditation	●●○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	●○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	●●●○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise Begging	●●●●○	Survival	●●●○○	Occult	●●○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	●●○○○	Life	●●○○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	○○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	
Arcane	●○○○○
Avatar	●○○○○
Contacts	●●●○○
Dream	●●●●○
	○○○○○

Arete ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ / □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Health

Bruised	-0
Hurt	-1
Injured	-1
Wounded	-2
Mauled	-2
Crippled	-5
Incapacitated	

Merits/Flaws

Quintessence

Paradox

Resonance: Dynamic Whirling ●○○○○; Entropic ○○○○○; Static ○○○○○

Experience

Prime flowed through you, and you felt like a conduit for the power of Unity. You knew that you had to keep whirling, that you had to keep the energy flowing. Your dance lasted for hours, and you felt as if you could keep whirling forever.

After the dance ended at sunset the other dervishes explained what you'd experienced. They introduced themselves as Darwushim, and told you that you'd connected to the power of Prime, the raw energy of Unity; that by spinning with them you had joined in channeling the energy between Earth and heaven. Although dubious at first, you couldn't deny what you'd felt. Since you had no meager belongings to pack, you simply ran home to give your parents a farewell, and then picked up a new life!

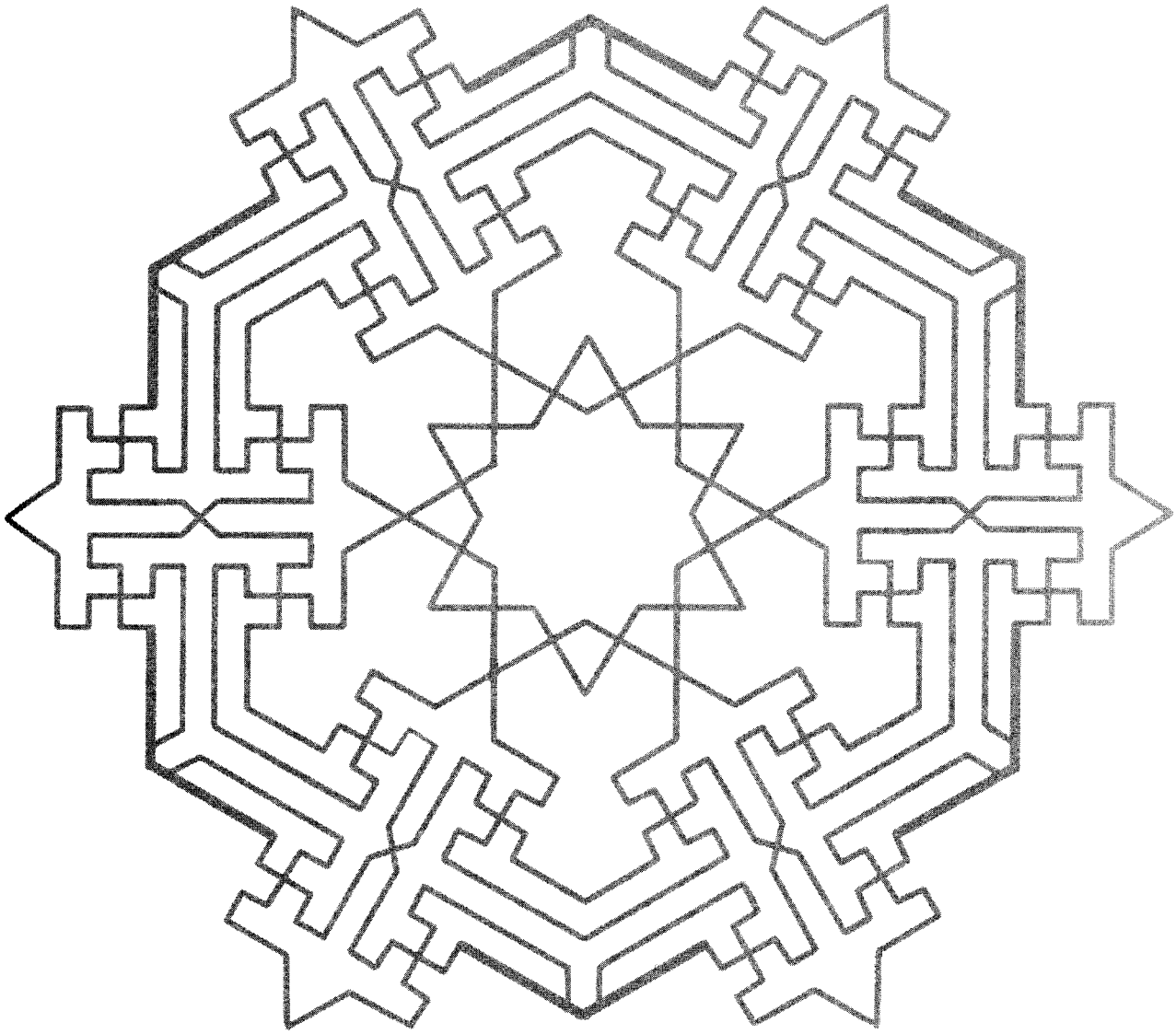
After a year of whirling through many cities, you decided that it was time to go your own way. The dervishes had taught you what little they knew, but if you were going to find deeper-buried secrets, you'd have to do it on your own.

Concept: An exuberant youth, inexperienced in the ways of the modern world or the wonders of wealth — but at the same time, you do not miss such luxuries. You thrill to the feeling of Prime coursing through your body and Avatar. People may think you strange, but they also respect your dedication, so you make a meager living as you travel from place to place, looking for... what?

Roleplaying Tips: You're jabbery, ebullient and outgoing — not at all what most people would expect from a "holy man." Indeed, you're still just a kid at heart. You know better than to try to push people into becoming a dervish, but you're more than happy to let a few other people whirl if the mood strikes them. Overall you're caring and a little naïve, not sure what you need from life, but pretty content with what you have, except that *something* compels you to go on.

Magic: You channel Prime with your whirling motions, obviously. Correspondence manifests through your spinning as well; all locations seem to blend into one and your mind clearly manifests everything about you, and you can even move from place to place with incredible rapidity. Your Life training comes in the form of a keen awareness of your body and your capabilities, because of your long dance and journeys.

Equipment: Shoufa, water flask, jambiya





CHAPTER TWO: TAFTÂNI

PRELUDE: FIRE POWER



The black splinter jet arcing across the sky above the vast expanse of hot sand was more than a little unusual. Its monitoring and detection systems were extraordinary, as was its attack capability. It was quiet, fast and turned on a dime. Any unenlightened aeronautical technician would, in fact, find it far beyond merely state of the art. No one ever said working for the Technocracy was without its perks, and the HIT Mark in the cockpit knew better. While some HIT Marks were simple automata, barely-aware machinery, Rogers was of a different breed: One of the few human cyborgs. Rogers also maintained an enthusiastic zeal for his work that his colleagues found rather disconcerting, but they couldn't deny his efficiency in settling anomalous situations straight — some said he was the best (and most ruthless) since Brice Hill.

"Stormbase, this is Rogers. I have affirmative visual on that reported destabilizing element, and I am closing."

The "destabilizing element" zigzagging through the desert sky was a man in his thirties. He wore a long black beard, a black turban and an ornately embroidered vest that his mother had made for him when he left home to take his apprenticeship. It was faded now and, in many places, scorched. His name was Khalil Mahmud ibn Hijazi, and he was sitting on a carpet. Specifically, he was sitting on a blue and white flying carpet that he had woven himself.

Inside the cockpit, Rogers was eagerly engaging the plane's extraordinary tracking and weapons systems. He looked forward to this kill. Reality Deviants (RDs for short) in the west at least had the common sense to know their place in the paradigm and stay out of sight. Here in the Rub al-Khali, toward the bottom of the Arabian Peninsula, they seemed to be getting a little out of hand; or, as his father had said about the blacks, "downright uppity." He was looking forward to teaching this one, at least, that there was no room in the world for rebellious anachronisms.

His first barrage of heat-seeking missiles would have been more than enough to neutralize the RD, but something went wrong. They never detached from the wings of the plane. Nevertheless, they exploded just as they were supposed to.

His instrument panel lit up like the Fourth of July sky; the prominent color was red. The altimeter was shrieking like a dying servomotor. The fuselage of the plane, sans wings, was falling out of the sky like the piece of heavy machinery that it was.

Rogers' ejection seat triggered automatically. After the initial blast and a short plummet, his 'chute opened up. He was safe, but his first thought was Shit! That was a two billion-dollar piece of equipment. The home office did not like losing its fancy toys. He would figure out how to explain that later.

On his fall, Rogers spotted the RD wheeling back around. He was developing a particular dislike for this Deviant. Maybe it was the lack of appropriate shame. All his other targets had had the good sense to at least repent their dangerous and destabilizing predilections toward the end. This one did not.

On the contrary, Khalil Mahmud ibn Hijazi's wide brown eyes sparkled with the giddy thrill of combat tinged, perhaps, with just a hint of arrogance. This was the first time he'd fought a dregvant — or anyone but another Taftâni, for that matter — and the excitement of being the Flame of Truth made his heart race even as he channeled Asha through his words in a simple chant of flame.

Rogers' parachute burst spectacularly into flame. The high-tech polymers of the hyalon parachute initially resisted the fire, but within seconds the parachute shredded and spatters of melted hyalon sizzled and fumed as they dripped past the HIT Mark's head.

Rogers was still fifteen thousand feet above the sand when he started falling in earnest. He would have more than enough time to reach critical velocity. He initiated a damage absorption Procedure in his cybernetic legs and waited for impact. He thought that perhaps the sand would help soften his landing.

Meanwhile, he activated the chain gun, easing it out of its casing in his arm. He then performed the appropriate targeting Procedures (including a gyroscopic countermotion to prevent himself from being spun around by the recoil) and fired at the man on the flying carpet.

Khalil Mahmud ibn Hijazi quickly incanted an old poem called Infidel's Laughter that sent the bullets flying back in the direction from which they came. He was, himself, laughing, when the grenades went off behind him. The shrapnel bounced off him just as the bullets had, but the shockwave of the blast caught him anyway.

The HIT Mark saw the RD get blasted from his damned carpet. He wanted to watch the RD to make sure he didn't pull anything fancy, but he had to begin paying attention to his own imminent impact.

The sand below looked fairly soft, as sand goes, and he noted that he was catching a serious updraft rising from the hot dunes. That might help break his fall a bit as well. He was very lucky that way.

Still, when he landed, he felt it.

Rogers' cybernetic legs, rammed three feet deep in the sand, absorbed most of the shock and immediately began repair Procedures. The rest of him was shaken, but his amplified endorphin flow kept him from actually feeling any pain. He scanned himself for serious damage and was relieved to discover that the damage wasn't nearly as bad as it initially seemed. After a few seconds of systems diagnostics as he extricated himself from the sand, Rogers ran a probability analysis and began walking to where he expected the RD to touch down.

As he tumbled out of the sky, Khalil Mahmud ibn Hijazi did not need to hope for a sequence of helpful coincidences to help him survive. He did not use that brand of coward-magic, particularly not here in the Rub al-Khali. Instead, he called out to the spirits he had bound to his service. He called, in particular, to the Spirit of the fierce Simoon, the greatest of the desert wind spirits. The wizard closed his eyes as Simoon rushed up, hot and abrasive, embraced him like a lover and set him delicately on the blowing sands.

When Khalil Mahmud ibn Hijazi finished cleaning the sand from his eyes, he opened them, and the damnable robot man was standing in front of him, grinning. The enormous chain gun was engaged and ready to fire.

The Arab stared at the cyborg and spat out words that sounded vulgar to the HIT Mark. The Iterator's computers accessed the Arabic language modules, and just as he came to the conclusion that what the Arab had said was "Kill him," an enormous fist the size of a camel's hump slammed into, and through, the HIT Mark like a wayward SCUD missile.

Blood and coolant spattered the hot sand, and the HIT Mark's high-tech alloy armor hung from exposed sinews like halves of a clamshell hanging from the valve muscle.

The djinni withdrew his enormous fist and shook off the clinging fluids. "Your every wish delights me, my lord."

As if out of habit, the wizard replied, "As it should," as he took a shiny copper flask of fire out of his vest pocket. He unstopped it and poured golden fire over the prone cybernetic organism at his feet.

Hissing and popping ensued. Black smoke, sweet and acrid, billowed into the wide blue sky. Within seconds there was nothing left of the HIT Mark but carbon and slag fusing with the sand.

The Arab narrowed his eyes as his body shook with adrenaline and rage. "Not good enough, dregvant. While we Weavers are a rare breed, what we lack in number, we make up for in fire. This battle is ours."



GLOSSARY

Taftâni language and culture evolved from, and consequently owes more to, the Aryans (the original Persians after whom the country of Iran is named) than to the Arabs. The Taftâni have, in fact, made a concerted effort to limit the Arabic influence on their language, largely because — even after 1,400 years — and even though most modern Taftâni are themselves of Arab extraction — they still resent the Arabic invasion of Persia. No one ever said the Weavers couldn't hold a grudge.

The terms closest to the heart of Taftâni philosophy come from a variety of languages, including Arabic, Armenian, Avestan, Greek, Gujarati, Old Persian, Pahlavi and Sanskrit.

Aramaiti: A mind purified by atar, i.e., a clear mind ready to use magic (though not necessary capable of doing so).

Asha: Truth, order or righteousness; the highest principle in Taftâni philosophy. Also, the universe as it truly is, not just as humans are capable of perceiving it. (Traditionalists claim that Asha is the Taftâni's equivalent of the Tenth Sphere, though the Taftâni themselves disagree, claiming that the relationship of Asha to the Spheres is more complex than that.)

Ashavant: Follower of Truth, one who uses magic liberally, especially in front of those who need to see it most (i.e., Sleepers).

Atar: Fire when referred to in its sacred sense, also the "thought-fire" of a purified mind. A common Taftâni metaphor for magic.

Atash: Another (more general) word for fire, also the Taftâni term for the Sphere of Forces.

Bundahishen: "Potential" or "Creation." The Taftâni term for the Sphere of Prime.

Chinvat: Bridge over the abyss; bridge to the afterlife. "Crossing the chinvat" is also a Taftâni term for a final suicidal display of spectacularly vulgar magic performed in front of Sleepers with the intent of proving the existence of magic.

Dahr: "Time" or "Fate." Often used to denote the Entropy Sphere.

druj: Falsehood, including all unenlightened beliefs, assumptions, opinions and thought.

Dregvant: Follower of Druj. A liar or evil person. Frequently a term referring to someone who knows that magic works but colludes with the status quo anyway.

Fravashi: "the animating fire." That which allows a mere physical being to experience Asha (i.e., the Avatar)

Getig: The physical, visible world. Asha trapped in mere material. Also the Taftâni word denoting the Sphere of Matter.

Gumezishen: "Mixture" or "Conflict." The term for the specific sites where Asha and Druj are in most intense conflict. Because Taftâni believe that all life is generated by this conflict, this is also the Taftâni term for the Life Sphere.

Hamestagan: Literally, "The place that is neither heaven (i.e., Asha) nor hell (Druj)." The Taftâni term for the Mind Sphere.

Haram: "Sanctuary." The absolute and inviolable truce called twice a year by Taftâni during which attendees discuss developments in the world, show off their apprentices and carouse.

Haurvatat: Literally, "Integrity;" referring to the Taftâni principle of direct and unhesitant action

Jashan: Magic.

Kahin: "Seer;" a Sha'ir who focuses on the Sphere of Entropy, interpreting the battle movements of Asha and Druj to sense how the universe is preparing to move instead of relying on Spirits.

Magos: (plural: magoi) An Old Persian term for a priest or user of magic. The old, original, form of the word "mage."

Manthra: A magical phrase repeated until it loses meaning, at which time the Taftâni believes that the meaning has departed the realm of Hamestagan and entered the realm of Asha, where it can affect the flow of outcomes in the universe.

Medin: A poetic eulogy given by a current or former Taftâni apprentice when his master dies.

Qismat: Destiny or lot. Persian word that eventually became "kismet."

Ribash: "Enigma," "Puzzle," "Resistance" or "Obstacle;" The Taftâni term for the Sphere of Correspondence.

Sha'ir: Literally "one who knows;" a poet. A Taftâni who works primarily by weaving Asha into his words with sound, rhyme and meter. Sha'ir focus predominantly on the Spirit Sphere and speak with djinn and other spirits on a regular basis.

Menog: The Invisible World or an inhabitant thereof (referring to Spirits in general, not necessarily just djinn). Also the Taftâni term for the Spirit Sphere.

Vizier: An archaic term, derived from the same linguistic root as "wizard," used to describe anyone making obvious use of magic, particularly the Spheres of Entropy, Spirit and Time.

Wali: (plural: awliya) Literally, "One who is close;" referring to a friend, relative, protector or helper. Sometimes a "saint" of the Taftâni tribe. The word used by apprentices to refer to their mentors.

Wizarishen: "Separation." The time in the far future, after Truth has been realized, when Asha and Druj are eternally separated. Sometimes used interchangeably with Dahr to denote the Sphere of Entropy.

Zaotar: Literally "One who purifies creation." The term denoting the more aggressive, warlike Taftâni (compared to the Kahin).

Zurvan: "Time." Used both generally and to refer to the Time Sphere.

History



The bold magical style of those called the Taftâni can be traced back five thousand years. We began speaking with the sky, the waters and the *djinn* shortly after mankind was able to use language at all. When the first civilizations appeared there between the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, we were there as the seers and the viziers to kings. The cowardly Batini are magical children next to us.

Five thousand years ago, the first poet-seers (Sha'ir) began weaving Asha, or Truth, into their words to make the world change in accordance with their words. When they invested time to be sure that their words were in line with Asha, they were capable of speaking with djinn and other spirits. Furthermore, when they spoke of the future, their predictions almost invariably came to pass. Whether that was because they had prophesied or because they had focused their will to make their words come true none knew, but the cause was moot when the effect was so powerful

In time, they discovered that there was no skill that could not benefit from using craft to reveal Asha. A clay pot could carry the weight of Truth just as effectively as an iron cauldron or a glass bowl. Using those techniques, the great magoi began weaving magic into everything. Swords made by an enlightened bronze-worker could wield themselves while Awakened sculptors, attentive to the Truth of what they did, created statuary of stone or clay that could walk and perform simple duties. Carpets flew, balls of crystal showed events taking place far away, and hollow metal rods spewed liquid fire at the

Timeline of Taftâni History

3500 BCE Artisan-priests of Babylon discover sacred geometry and astrology

2300 BCE Sargon of Akkad gathers seers and magicians to him and conquers the Sumerians. All Mesopotamia comes under his rule.

1120-630 BCE Ma'inite period

1020 BCE Hebrews found kingdom in Palestine

996 BCE Birth of Suleiman the Wise

966 BCE Suleiman founds the city of Palmyra in what is now central Syria, NE of Damascus. It was to become a great trade center at junction of several trade routes.

945 BCE The 10,000 Djinn Plague begins

939 BCE Suleiman compiles and releases the Solomonic Code

930 BCE The 10,000 Djinn Plague ends with Arabic wizards trapping thousands upon thousands of djinn in vessels

965 BCE Arabian wizards unite to confront the 10,000 djinn plague.

928 BCE Suleiman dies under mysterious circumstances

800 BCE until after the rise of Himyar, was known as the Sabaean period

550 BCE Cyrus the Great establishes Persian Empire

500 BCE Night of Fana, beginning of Ahl-i-Batin

500 BCE Persia becomes center of vast Achaemenid Empire that stretches from southeast Europe and North Africa in the west to India in the east, and from the Caucasus mountains and the Syr Darya River in the north to the Gulf of Oman in the south. The Taftâni are hailed as great mystics, warriors and purveyors of Truth.

490-250 BCE Within a relatively short period of time, viziers establish four great cities through great acts of magic. Ad, Thamud, Tasm and Jadis are built by the Taftâni and their followers. The Taftâni kings and warlords of these cities engage in increasingly destructive battles until all four cities are blasted beyond recognition and their few surviving inhabitants are forced to flee.

400 BCE to 250 CE. Petra made by Nabateans.

331 BCE Alexander the Great wins battle of Arbela and conquers Persian Empire

100 BCE Establishment of silk routes brings Taftâni into contact with Wu Lung wizards of China

115 BCE to 300 CE First Himyarine period

160 CE Romans capture Palmyra

235-292 CE Petra ceases to be a trade city and becomes a key sacred site and center of prophecy for the Kahin until it falls to the Christians.

260 CE Persians attempt to invade Palmyra; Rome can't defend it. Palmyra repels the Romans itself

267-274 Queen Zenobia, the Fiery Queen of Palmyra, takes back Syria and Egypt from Romans using blatant acts of magic. However, she was defeated and captured by Aurelian — supported by Hermetics — who destroyed Palmyra.

300 to 650 second Himyarite period — Orchards and groves of Ma'rib — great palace of Ghumdan

610 Weavers unite (uneasily) with the armies of Mohammed to destroy Al-Malek Al-Majun Ibn Iblis, last of the Devil Kings

641 Islamic Arabs invade Persia ending long Taftâni reign

650 Hazan I-Sabbah labels the Taftâni, helping them to band together against Islamic zealots

735 Death of Dhu al-Rumma, last of the Desert Poets who didn't feel the need to hide from Islamic hegemony

1258 Fall of Baghdad to the Mongols, death of Baha al-Din Zuhayr, the great Taftâni scholar and the end of real Taftâni power in the Middle East.

1453 Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople and overthrow Byzantine Empire

1455 CE Fall of Persian court of Artaxerxes; survival of Canyon of Qu-Dali

1910 CE Henry Ford brings thousands of Arabs from several Middle East countries to Detroit to work in his automobile plants.

1917 CE World War I brings Technocrats by the hundreds into the Middle East. Paradigm ossifies. Taftâni begin dying from Paradox in numbers even greater than they die from dueling.

bearer's enemy. The viziers had free reign to create whatever Effects they could effectively master.

In 2300 BCE, Sargon of Akkad gathered as many of these viziers, seers, poets and Awakened craftsmen as he could find. He offered them full bellies, beautiful lovers, royal favors and power in exchange for their assistance in a matter of some political import. No larger collection of viziers has yet been assembled on this planet. With their aid, Sargon conquered the Sumerians easily and united all Mesopotamia under his rule. Those who had wielded magic for him were richly rewarded and given life-long advisory positions. Thus, the tradition of the court vizier began.

Magic was not doubted then. How could it be? Every city-state had its magician, vizier, wizard or magus. They created great tools, great cities and great empires. The high plains of Persia were home to many of the more potent masters of Asha. Their clarity was such that they were capable of creating unlimited wonders and reality flowed to change in accordance with their will.

Spirits were more revered in those days, and they were quite confident of their importance. The djinn were far more arrogant than they could ever be today. They behaved as if they were herders of men, preventing us from inhabiting lands they didn't want us to inhabit, and demanding sacrifices of everything from wheat to children.

The will of those who could perform magic was pitted against the will of the djinn, and the results were mixed. Some among the djinn were willing to serve humans; likewise, some humans were equally willing to act as lackeys of the djinn. Beginning with Sargon's gathering of seers and spirit-binders, the conflicts between the Menog, or Invisible World and the Getig, or Material World, were slowly becoming more frequent and more violent.

After nearly two millennia — take a moment to ponder how long that was — of increasing conflict between the viziers and the djinn, open and violent hostilities broke out between humans and djinn in 945 BCE. Djinn wrecked human cities, slew miracle workers, diverted water from cities and, with illusions, diverted supply caravans into the wastes of the desert. They hadn't given any thought to the notion that any human spellbinder might learn to master them. That was their arrogance leading them into a trap.

The Hebrews had been doing what they could to establish themselves in the ancient Middle East. They founded a kingdom in Palestine and from there spread out through the region and founded cities throughout Palestine and Israel.

While the Hebrews had their viziers, they were less adept at craft-magic and most of their mages were content to deal with spirits and manipulate the world indirectly. Among these magicians was a brilliant young man named Suleiman.

Suleiman was, among other things, an explorer, a brilliant will-worker, and, ultimately, the king of the Hebrews. The list of accomplishments and virtues is lengthy. The most important among them are the founding of Palmyra and the discovery of the Solomonic Code.

Suleiman the Wise

By all accounts, the greatest talent of the man who would become king of the Hebrew people was his ability to attend to detail. His knowledge of human nature was both famed and respected, and when the spirits and demons of the wastes began plaguing the cities he was responsible for, he turned his keen insight on djinn nature as well.

His work with spirits had shown Suleiman that most spirits were consigned to play a specific role with respect to humans. Some were adversaries, others were helpers and still others were simply entities assigned to oversee a particular natural phenomenon. Suleiman reckoned that these spirits didn't perform those specific duties of their own accord but, rather, had simply been tasked with them as part of some heavenly order.

After questioning several spirits with regard to what they did, Suleiman ascertained that most of them had no idea *why* they did what they did. When he asked a nature spirit to perform the function of a hearth spirit, however, it was unable to do so. Slowly, he realized that Spirits were bound by laws they did not know and could not perceive. In time, he codified many of these, leading to a vast advantage for mages when dealing with djinn in the visible world.

While Suleiman himself was more Hermetic or Chorister in outlook, the Taftâni were the true beneficiaries of his work, and it is they who have preserved the many versions of the Solomonic Code and they who have used it most extensively.

Palmyra

Suleiman founded the great city of Palmyra as a trade city between the Roman and Persian Empires. For centuries it was controlled by Taftâni viziers who kept peace with the threat of magic. With time and infighting, the mages who once kept control over the city and kept it firmly within the Persian Empire disappeared. Most of them had killed each other in duels over small slights.



By 160 CE, it had fallen into the hands of the Romans and their Hermetic enforcers.

In 267 CE, however, the very fiery Taftâni, Zenobia, took the city from the Romans and began annexing territory left and right.

She stretched too far. After trying to take land from Rome, Aurelius and a strike team of Roman magi captured her and destroyed the city. She was the last Taftâni mage to rule anything.

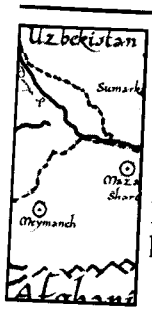
Petra

Petra, called the rose-red city for the stone it was carved from, was established by the Nabateans in 400 BCE. For years afterward, it was the favored spot for the Kahin to hold court and get paid for their divinations.

The city went back and forth between Persia and Rome for centuries, but in 235 CE, it ceased being the trade city it once was, and for seventy years it became a holy place of the Kahin. Haunted and strange, others avoided it, until the Christians invaded in 297 CE. They let it fall into disuse and abandoned it.

For years a vampire lived there until a force of Kahin fell on Petra, ousted the vampire and his spirit servitors and made it theirs again in 2001, a sign that the Taftâni aren't quite as finished as they might seem.

Geopolitics



While the popular notion may remain that the Taftâni are gone, or at most confined to the Middle East, this isn't entirely true. We've had our hooks in the spread of a global community. Granted our homelands remain, well, *home*, but one never knows where Asha might show itself.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

You don't really know what to make of us, do you? We aren't quite your noble, long-suffering Tradition mages, and we're not just your Romantic desert nomads, either. We are the rats and the cockroaches of the magical world. Our penchant for thinking, showing

and acting with utter adherence to Asha makes us repugnant to the lapdogs of disorder and falsehood. We are stomped upon repeatedly, and yet we never die. Not only can we survive in the harshest environments but we make a point of doing so on a regular basis. Any setting where the beliefs of the common people haven't been usurped by the Technocrats works for us. If that means that we have to establish our homes in places others consider inhospitable, so be it. When you have the freedom to use it with impunity, magic makes any place comfortable. Part of becoming one of the Taftâni, you have to understand, is learning to cultivate a certain amount of shamelessness about when and where magic is practiced. Quaking, shivering timidity will get you nowhere. We are born crying, the pains of life keep us in tears, and when we have cried enough, we die. Pain and death are foregone conclusions for most of us; the only thing that varies from life to life is the degree of shamelessness you get to exhibit in the interim.

We're not as common at the moment as we have been at other times in history. The most recent of our golden ages is now over a thousand years past. Places where we were once found we are found no longer, and places where we were strong we are all but gone. But everywhere we have been, we have left remnants of our presence, and you can find them still if you but seek them out.

At various times, we have been the dominant presence in countries whose modern names you don't even know and perhaps have never heard. Of course we thrived in Persia, now called Iran; of course we were numerous in Arabia, in Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. But at various times, we were the masters of dozens more lands, many of which you couldn't even find on a map. Taftâni palaces have floated above the mountains and deserts of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Israel and Egypt. We have commanded spirits and performed acts of Jashan in Bulgaria, Greece, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Even today we can be found in the mountains and wilds of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Kurdistan, Uzbekestan, Tajikistan and on the island of Cyprus. We have woven, forged and composed our magic as far east as Kashmir, Tibet, Mongolia and the mountains of western China and as far west as Spain and France. In Africa we have been the predominant magical presence in Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Are we still the masters of all these places? No. Do not take this for our death knell, however. We're not ready to die out just yet. On the contrary, we are a conflict-loving people, and these are conflict-rich times. We remain plentiful in the out of the way places, the unwanted places, the poor places that remain unconquered by the dregvanti of the Technocracy. Practitioners of Taftâni magic can now be found, among other places, in North and South America, in Spain, in Russia, in India and in numerous Middle Eastern and African countries. Where sand and scorpions can be found, so too can be found the Taftâni. Where bandits and lawlessness prevail, so prevail the Taftâni. It is not national borders or continental demarcation that determine where the Weavers are found. More than anything, Taftâni whereabouts are dictated by where we can get away with performing magic. Open spaces, thinly populated, appeal to us. The appeal is heightened if the region maintains a relatively hot, dry climate year round. It's not as though we *couldn't* live in cool, wet climates, but, with a few notable exceptions, it simply hasn't worked out that way.

Ah, I see. You're confused. You hadn't heard of us before, and you're wondering how we could have avoided the spotlight for so long. Do you think that you know everything that takes place on your planet because you listen to the radio, watch your television and read the paper? If you do, you are being played for a fool. Nine out of every ten journalists is a puppet, and if there is no news breaking, no money changing hands, no little war or rebellion, then your journalists, your soldiers, your *agents provocateurs*, will not be there bringing it to you live. At any given time, more of your world is dark than is illuminated. And the one thing you can adamantly count on the Technocracy preventing you from seeing is the one thing we do best: magic.

So, naïve one, remember this: Just because there are no roaches on your counters does not mean that they're not swarming through your walls.

Where We Are

We are everywhere in the lost places of the Middle East. There is no lack of deserts, of mountains, of wastelands where civilization (and thus the Technocracy) has not come running in. There's no need for me to go country by country, when I can sum it up like this: If there's a wasteland, we're there. It is not borders that contain us, but civilization. We're in the lost places of Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Sudan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Morocco (in the High Atlas Mountains), Kurdistan, Nigeria, Tajikistan, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Uzbekestan, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kashmir, Tibet, Mongolia (there are fewer of us near China since the Chinese are very aggressive about being rid of their visiting viziers). Need I go on? You get the idea.

It is thought that we are dying out, that we are a vanishing breed, but I sometimes wonder, if you took all

the Taftâni in the Middle East, mightn't there be more of us than some of the odd, but more visible and more organized, Tradition mages? Time, I suppose, will tell.

ARABIA: THE RUB AL-KHALI

There is no doubt that the Rub al-Khali is one of the places we are strongest. While our enemies, including the Muslims and the arrogant Technocrats—may their souls roast on a spit in hell—have pushed us into the wastes at every turn, we are now the rulers of the wasteland and our enemies are not welcome here. In this place, our magic and mastery of the *djinn* assures our superiority. Do not believe that the arrogant Technocrats—may their souls roast on a spit in hell—have not tried to make incursions

Within the Empty Quarter, the paradigm is not theirs, but ours. Reality will not burn me because I fly on a carpet, because I call down fire from the sun or because I catch storms in a bottle. And it's amazing how often your precious technology fails out here. Sand chokes engines; lines go down; batteries go dead. No connection. *Djinn* are as free as the other desert vermin to roam as they please and misguide and deceive whom they will.

The Simoon—that poisonous, hot and raging spirit—is, perhaps, the most effective guardian of our kind that there has ever been. It is that spirit that Taftâni apprentices training here learn to appease first and the first we summon when we are in need.

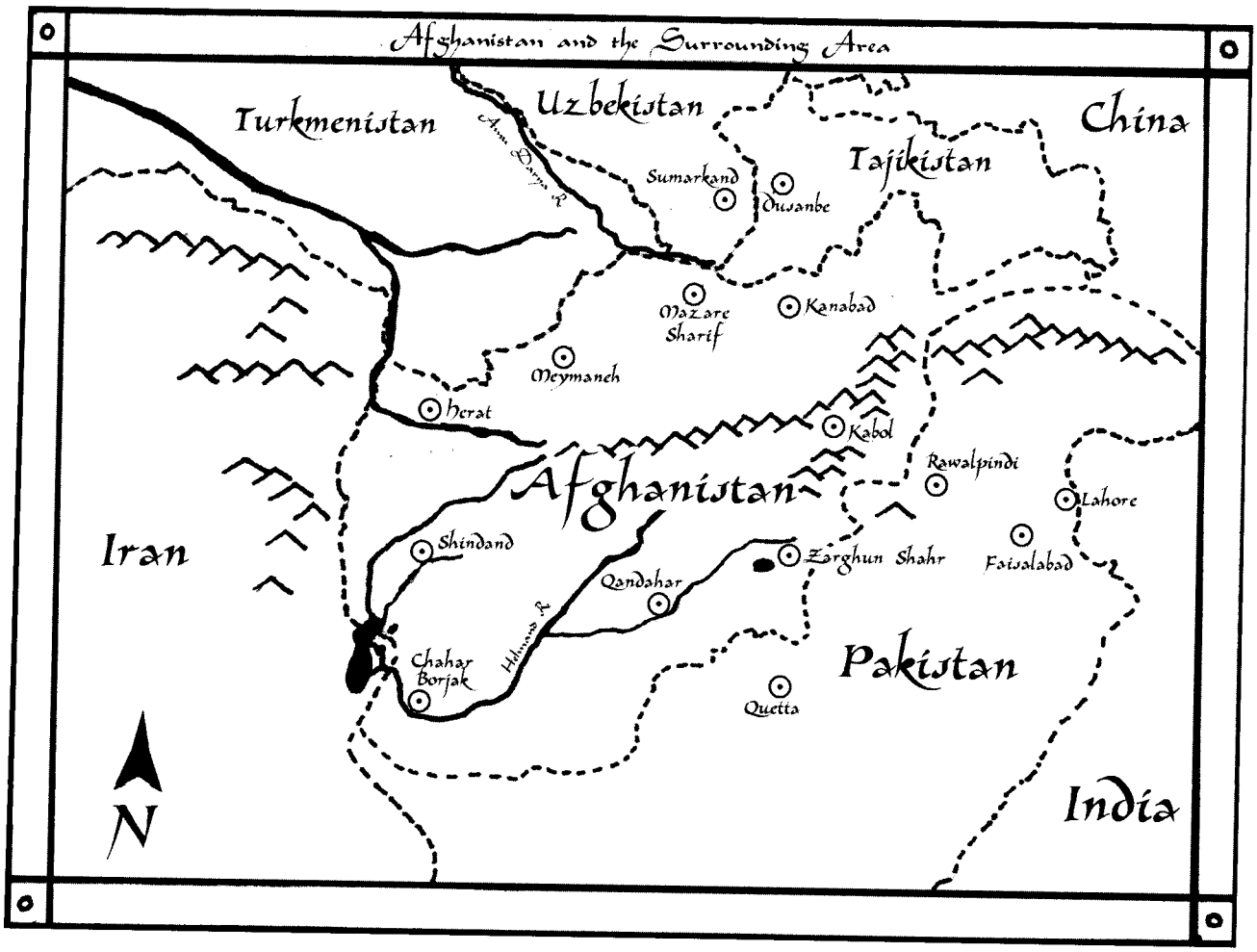
If any one area could be said to have any sort of significant population of Taftâni, this would be it.

IRAN

Iran was the birthplace of the Taftâni, and though the modern Shi'ite nation bears no resemblance to the Aryan Persian Empire, many Weavers still reside high in the Zagros Mountains and deep in the salt deserts to the east.

AFGHANISTAN

Okay, I'm going to tell you all about Afghanistan. Assume that I'm being very general in my definitions. I'm talking about the whole of the uncivilized region that runs through eastern Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And what I say about this region also applies to most of those other places where the Taftâni have established themselves, so if you want to know who we are and where you're likely to find us, pay attention.



After the Rub al-Khali, the place where the Taftâni have had their greatest successes in recent years is undoubtedly Afghanistan. Afghanistan has long been a stronghold for the Weavers, but in 1978, a toady to the West named Noor Taraki tried to bring in the Soviet Technocracy. There was a glorious conflict during which the Taftâni did the unthinkable — worked together against a common enemy. For years, the local paradigm was neither Mystic nor Technocratic; it was Destructive. Any sort of destructive Effect was coincidental, and the Weavers reveled. Djinn wrecked tanks, lightning bolts detonated munitions storage bunkers and chaos reigned supreme. Taftâni warlords led tribal war parties called *lashkari* against their foes to great effect. Even a single *Lashkar* comprising Taftâni, consors, djinn and allied mortals could pick apart Technocratic forces like a piano wire garrote slicing through soft flesh. The results surprised even the Taftâni.

The Syndicate pumped 3.3 *billion* American dollars and untold billions of Soviet rubles into what the Technocrats expected to be a mop up operation. Thirteen years and thousands of deaths later, in September of 1991, both Technocratic powers signed a treaty to stop meddling in the area.

Since that glorious victory, most of the country in the south and the west has been taken over by fundamentalist Muslim army called the *taliban*. While a western mage could mistake the *taliban* — who wear black clothing, black turbans and dark sunglasses — for Men in Black, such is not the case. They're staunch foes of anything that weakens faith, including technology. On the other hand, while members of the *taliban* are unswervingly Islamic, they are not suicidal. For thirteen years they fought alongside the Taftâni *lashkari*, and they know what the magi are capable of. So long as the Weavers are content to keep their anti-Islamic opinions to themselves, the *taliban* is content to leave them alone. The Weavers' mortal associates, called the *mujahedin*, "holy warriors," on the other hand, are not so lucky. The interminable skirmishes between the *taliban* to the south and the *mujahedin* to the north take their toll on both sides. Unless the *taliban* gets overzealous, the Taftâni are willing to overlook moderate *mujahedin* casualties in the name of maintaining what passes for peace here.

Two of the greatest Taftâni warlords, Rashid Dostum and Haji Ayub Afridi, control large tracts of the country (and the paradigm therein). Dostum is master of the Mazar-i-Sharif city/region in the far north of Afghanistan and Afridi and maintains a large sanctum in Jalalabad in the northeast, just east of Kabul.

Other areas of the country, notably the Khyber Pass that leads from Kabul to Peshawar and the Towr Kham region are controlled by the *mujahedin* and constantly trading hands among a number of less powerful Weavers, most of whom are former apprentices of either Dostum's or Afridi's.

Nor does our presence in the region stop at the Afghani border. Taftâni pocket warlords are nestled throughout the mountainous regions in both Pakistan and Tajikistan.

The northern section of Pakistan, called the Northwest Territory, is wild and mountainous, and the Sind and Balochistan Provinces in the south compose an enormous wasteland; the Taftâni did not need a written invitation to set up housekeeping. Outside the relatively civilized eastern portion of the country, not much of Pakistan is Tech-friendly. At the same time, the fine ladies and gentlemen of the Technocracy do what they can to keep Westerners out of the "dangerous tribal areas," lest they see something their delicate Western eyes shouldn't. Taftâni wizards dueling it out from flying carpets, for example.

Turkey

Western Turkey is a bit overly civilized for us, which is to say, the Technocracy has been building up there for a while. You can still find us here, just look to the eastern half of the country.

Northern Africa

In the golden age of the Taftâni, we needed space for ourselves. We're fond of our solitude, and at that time, the deserts of northern Africa gave us the quiet and privacy we needed to master the djinn. We're all along the top of the continent: Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia. If it's uncivilized, we're there.

Other Places

A smattering of Taftâni have settled in the Western Sahara, particularly in the northern regions of Mauritania and around the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. While tantamount to banishment, it's nothing they're not used to, and it grants those anti-social magi the freedom to ply their magic as they choose without interference from the Technocracy, though large enough displays may be picked up on satellite, prompting teams of Technocrats to go in and institute Reality Defense Maneuvers (or RDMs for short).

We are by no means limited to the places where we are strong. Nor do we play the role of warlord every-

where we settle — that's a side effect of circumstance, not the nature of the Taftâni. We just adapt as we need to. We may be arrogant and stubborn, but we are not stupid. We see as clearly as anyone that circumstances are conspiring to wipe us out if we do not take bold steps. Those steps are being taken even now, and they are taking us to Spain, to Mexico and to America.

Spain

A great experiment many years ago landed a number of Taftâni in Spain. During the Crusades, the Muslims were happy to have us as allies — so long as the Christians remained a threat. The results of that alliance were only moderately successful. The southern rim of Spain was, at one point, relatively thinly settled, and the Muslims were rather less zealous than they are now; Weavers could practice their magic without fear of discovery, or at least without fear of serious consequences. Then the Reconquista swarmed down, expelling the Muslims and us with them. When the Spanish zealots launched their Inquisition, many of our number were scrutinized too closely for their own good. More often than not it wasn't the Inquisitors who killed them, but the bite of their own magic once the Scourge arose. Things just got worse when the Scourge gave way to Paradox. The climate of Spain still suits us fine, and the swarthy complexions possessed by most of our number do not draw undue attention there. A handful of Taftâni reside in Spain, scattered from Cadiz to Algeciras to Granada to Cartagena and all along the Costa del Sol. We tend to live in the mountains, and sometimes *in* the mountains, which are there filled with extensive cavern systems. It is the curious we seek to avoid, so we stay outside the cities.

Mexico

While there are not a great many Weavers there yet, the state of Chihuahua in Mexico offers us all the solitude we could want. Mexico isn't a place for flashy magic — anything that draws attention invariably draws other things that watch from the seedy cracks — but it's also not the height of media attention. The clash of poverty, government and apathetic underworld elements means that another squalid stranger goes unnoticed, while the perversely suppressed economy means that the Technocracy pays far less attention to the country than it does to much of the rest of the Americas. And, of course, it's hot. What more could a Taftâni want? Secluded, grandiose estates, privacy and a willing populace....

The Price of Freedom

Taftâni value their freedom over all else. When they refused the invitation to join the Council of Nine, it was to protect their freedom. Likewise, freedom to use wild and vulgar magic — in their eyes, the freedom to tell an important truth — is more important to them than health, than safety and far more important than stability or the acceptance of others.

The Taftâni hold that the secret of freedom is to avoid being drawn into situations where their options are limited, or even unitary.

This is a notoriously difficult path to tread, and even the greatest masters of the Taftâni struggle with it. It forces the Weaver to transcend the limits of his own culture, society, relationships, family, personality, beliefs, prejudices, opinions and ideas. It is just these comforting chains which seem to give definition, meaning, character and a sense of belonging to those around him. Yet, in casting off one set of chains, the mystic cannot avoid adopting another set unless he wishes to settle for a greatly reduced and impoverished quality of life — itself a severe limit on freedom.

The solution adopted by the Taftâni is to become omnivorous and multitalented. An individual capable of thinking, believing, or doing any of a dozen different things is notably freer and more liberated than an individual with a single belief or talent. The more talents and skills a Weaver hones, the more valuable he is to himself and his kind.

For this reason, Taftâni apprentices are required to become polymaths, mastering a handful of secular trades in addition to their study of the Spheres. Weavers typically have a wide range of skills that may include storytelling, blacksmithing, soap making, herding camels, poetry, speaking, brewing, begging, hunting, law, medicine, translation and, of course, weaving. By developing a myriad of skills in this way, the mage insures that he doesn't rely on his magical abilities to the detriment of all others.

The United States

If ever a country has called out to the Taftâni, it is America. Brash, powerful, arrogant — all of our own traits we see reflected in the national temperament of

that land. While the legendary Black Shaykh may be able to control his temper and hide his light well enough to live in New York, there are more Weavers in the Southwest than anywhere outside the Empty Quarter and Afghanistan. We find the hot, dry expanse of land between Lido, Nevada and Barstow, California to meet with our full approval. There are few enough Sleepers living there that we do not feel pressed, and those who do live there are used to seeing odd things *and* are polite enough not to inquire into our business provided we do not inquire into theirs.

And while the Subtle Ones think New Mexico is theirs, they are mistaken if they think they are alone.

The vast portion of American Taftâni owe their presence in America to one of the foremost unwitting agents of the Technocracy: Henry Ford.

In the early part of the twentieth century, right around 1910, Ford needed labor for his automobile plants in Detroit. He found it in the Middle East. He brought in tens of thousands of workers from Yemen, Qatar, Oman, Syria and a handful of other countries. There were far more Ahl-i-Batin in that force than Taftâni, but some of us came over too. It opened our eyes to a whole new continent. Where *that* goes remains to be seen.

Beliefs

Creation

We don't particularly focus on what was or how things came to be. We're more concerned with how things are now and how we might get ourselves out of the corner we're in with the Technocracy. Let me put it to you in a nutshell: the universe as you see it is the product of the primal struggle between Asha (that is, Truth and order) and Druj (falsehood and disorder). The universe, therefore, is conflict made manifest. The places of the most intense conflict are those places where the universe is so agitated that it creates living things. Life, therefore, is conflict squared.

In time, Asha and Druj will pull apart and the universe will cease to be. There's a long time before that happens, though.

The Good of Plenty

Among the greatest goods known to mankind are hospitality and comfort. If one does not possess at least the potential for the latter, offering the former is decidedly more awkward. The greater the state of hardship in which one lives, the more precious and coveted will be the joy associated with its absence: comfort. With rare exceptions, the Taftâni are a desert people. We know about hardship. We know about heat and thirst and about being

The Taftâni Gods

One of the few threads uniting the Taftâni is their utter disdain for monotheism. The Taftâni view of the Sphere of Spirit is all the proof they need of an animistic world. They do not doubt for a second that gods and spirits inhabit the world around them, and the notion that there is only a single god is nothing short of ludicrous to them. The Weavers catalogue spirits and gods associated with a myriad of places, things and phenomena, if for no other reason than to know the names of the beings they're ordering about (or, less commonly, respectfully requesting favors of). Of the thousands of deities and spirits and *djinn* that figure prominently in Taftâni spirit lore, five of the more potent figures are considered to be particularly sacred..

The primary god of the Taftâni is Orhmazd, whom the Taftâni revere as omniscient, omnipresent, holy, invisible, and beyond human conceptualization. Only Orhmazd can directly know the entirety of Asha and only he knows the details of the struggle between Asha and Druj, including the date of the Separation (Wizarishen), essentially the defining eschatological event in Taftâni cosmology, when all conflict ceases.

The head goddess acknowledged by the Taftâni is the goddess al-Lat, the morning star. She is predominantly a goddess of wild places and sanctuary, and when Taftâni gather in *haram*, it is to her that the site is dedicated. Neither the felling of trees nor hunting, nor combat, nor hostile magic, nor pursuit of any sort — whether the prey is human or animal — is allowed on sites sacred to al-Lat.

Manat is the goddess of destiny, *Qismat* or fate, and has the largest following among the *Kahin*. She is said to have seduced Orhmazd to get him to tell her how the great conflict between Asha and Druj ends, and when she was subsequently overcome by guilt, she confessed her reasons for seducing him, to which Orhmazd replied "I know, but I needed you to do exactly that so you might tell the *Kahin* what you know."

The least revered of the four principal deities of the Taftâni is Hubal, whose name translates variously as "vapor," or "spirit." One of the many reasons the Taftâni have so little love for the invading Muslims is that it was originally Hubal who was worshipped at the Ka'ba in Mecca, and the followers of Islam simply moved in and claimed the sacred place for their one arrogant and pushy god, whom they called Allah.

blinded by sand in the eyes. These things we learn as apprentices (if not earlier) when we are at the mercy of the world. Once we complete our apprenticeship, we join the ranks of those who can command the world around them with their will alone. After that, I can assure you, we do not choose to suffer hardship any longer.

I have been one of the Taftâni for five decades. I know, or at least know of, as many of my kind as anyone, and I can tell you with great certainty that there are no ascetics among the Taftâni. We do not value hardship for hardship's sake nor do we romanticize suffering. The desert forces us to be very pragmatic about such things. Asceticism is a luxury of the unchallenged; in anyone else it is simply called hardship.

Those Taftâni warlords in the mountains of Afghanistan I mentioned? Their abodes, one within a mountain and one simply rendered invisible by a *djinni* servitor, are some of the most luxuriant and comfortable I've encountered. I have enjoyed the hospitality of each once. Met on the outside, in the chill of the Khyber pass, for example, both have the weary faces of battle-hardened men. Their beards are gray and their hands resemble devices of leather stretched over cord. Meeting either of them you'd swear they'd lived every day outside, and without the assistance of magic. However. Within their respective palaces — and I use the term deliberately — they become gentlemen of the most extreme leisure.

Dostum's lair inside the mountain looks as though he stole the hanging gardens of Babylon for his own use. The place is a jungle with waterfalls pouring into perfumed pools, parquet floors and walls of aromatic hardwoods and it is not small. There is ample space for his innumerable wives, children, grandchildren, concubines, servants, *djinn* and pets. Dostum, obviously, defies the usual image of Taftâni-as-hermit, but he's not the only one I know who does so to that extent. Afridi, I think, exceeds him on that account.

Afridi's massive home in Landi Kotal is decadent. He has built it as a temple to Asha and to all the things magic can do. The only reason he can get away with the enormous level of vulgar magic here is that it's far from any kind of Technocratic stronghold and he has it warded to high hell against trespassers and voyeurs. A sapphire-lined swimming pool heated by a captive fire elemental epitomizes the kind of place he has created for himself.

His retinue numbers in the low two hundreds, and they include all kinds of apprentices, mage wanna-bes, spirits, seers, mediums, gunmen and thugs. Despite being a devout megalomaniac, Afridi does a very good job of making things comfortable for those he supports. I find it

What, Are They Stupid?

The Taftâni are not stupid. They do not rail blindly against the Technocratic paradigm, they simply remember how things used to be, or, more accurately from a Weaver's point of view, how things are *supposed* to be. Taftâni culture dictates that they are entitled, as one of the oldest continuous magical traditions, and through the skills that they painstakingly develop, to inflict their will upon the world.

In the Taftâni's eyes, those willworkers who content themselves with using coincidental magic are *dregvanti*, desecrators, liars, assimilationists, dupes and unwitting allies of the Technocracy. They are content with their little magical works simply because they have neither sufficient respect for their arts nor the strength of dedication to take responsibility for their own magical actions. They are not dedicated enough to the cause of magic to take the consequences. Integrity demands that those who can wield vulgar magic *should* wield vulgar magic.

The Taftâni aren't stupid enough to believe that they can do magic without Paradox, they simply believe that by working vulgar magic openly they can jam a wedge into the paradigm and, with enough effort, change it. They may have a point. The drawback, of course, is that even the most valiant and stalwart Weaver becomes a little Paradox shy after his eightieth backlash, and while such vulgar displays do weaken the dominant paradigm, the consequences to the Weaver in question are much more destructive.

Toward the end of their lives, after they have finished training their last student, many Taftâni masters go to highly public places, full of Sleepers, and perform their last great Weaving as a sort of retributive strike against the status quo. While many mages, the Batini in particular, believe this to be pointless and little more than a messy suicide, the fact remains that the Wild quarter has yet to fall to the Technocratic paradigm, a state of affairs the Taftâni claim loudly to be their doing.

Taftâni who die in the pursuit of great magical workings (or in combat with the forces of the Technocracy) are considered martyrs.

ironic that the man with the most anti-social career in all of Taftâni-dom also happens to be the one who actually seems to be able to cooperate with others. Go fig.

Whereas Dostum is something of a family man, Afridi lives like the sorcerous drug lord he is.

All the Taftâni I've known have had a deep appreciation for comfort and the trappings of wealth. Our homes, whatever form they take, are invariably solidly built, (which is to say, a column of tanks couldn't take one out), sumptuously appointed, and warded to high hell. My own home, which is not in the Empty Quarter, I might add, is a self-contained paradise. The walls are hand carved scented wood. The vaulted ceiling is alabaster inlaid with turquoise. The air is perfumed with musk and myrrh and silk pillows full of crushed rose petals are strewn about for me to sit or lie upon. I command a retinue of *djinn* who prepare my food, draw my bath, repel unwanted guests and play backgammon with me should I be in the mood.

Just because we're allegedly barbarians, don't assume that we don't know how to live well.

Health and Wellness

To a Weaver, health and well-being are both functions of living in accord with Asha. In theory, cultivating *atar* and acting in accordance with *haurvatat* assure the Taftâni health and long life. Outside of that, nothing else is called for.

Oddly, this approach seems to work. Taftâni aren't big practitioners of Life magic, but, dueling and Paradox aside, those Weavers who strive to live in accordance with Asha typically live extremely long and healthy lives.

Taftâni Ascension

We do not share this notion of Ascension that you seem to have adopted from the Traditions. It has no point. An epiphany so subtle that it is missed by blinking one's eyes to keep the sand out is of no use to us. The only glorious end goal that I would say all Taftâni strive toward is the universal acceptance of the magic that is our heritage, the utter servitude of the *djinn* and an end to Paradox. Those are the goals with which we task ourselves.

The so-called "war" you have waged for magic has been notable only for its utter incompetence and for the degree to which you have done your adversary's work for him. Your precious Traditions have done nothing but aid and abet their own undoing by making secret and shameful that which would have been your salvation. The moment magic became anything but a common feat, it should have been every wizard's goal to work as much magic as dramatically as possible to show the untalented that just because its workings were beyond them, it need not be consigned to the realm of impossibility. Is that what you did? No. From its very beginnings, you took the Scourge, and then Paradox after it, as an excuse to deny that part of you that is most competent in the world. You felt a little pain, took a little slap on the wrist from reality and bowed your head in shame when that was your cue to work bigger works and thereby dredge the narrowing channel. You did not do that. The Taftâni? We did that. We wove tremendous magics to contain the 10,000 *Djinn* Plague. We constructed the most magnificent cities, the most lavish and ornate cities for our poet-sultans. When the Devil Kings raged across Arabia, who was raining down fire and scorpions upon them from flying carpets? That was us. And when the Scourge began giving a bite to magic, we proceeded as we always had: as wizards, seers and honest men. Many are the names of those great Weavers martyred for magic, but since when has serving on one's knees been preferable to dying on one's feet?

And today, by Orhmazd and Manat, we continue just as we always have, though fewer in number and more cruelly harried. While our greatest workings would bring us death today in one of your great and barren cities, we are still the masters of the Rub al-Khali. Through great sacrifice, we have made sure that those who live near the Empty Quarter know, and I mean truly *know*, that magic exists. Our elders regularly go to the populated edges of the Rub al-Khali and perform great works — sometimes at the cost of their lives — just to show the ignorant that it can be done. But their martyrdom has succeeded where your much-vaunted subtlety has failed. Within those great expanses, we still have the power to make carpets fly, to command the raging sandstorm and, as is our heritage, to command the fractious *djinn*. Now we are pondering how best to bring our Weavings to the masses of unenlightened who swarm across the world. I like to think that some great and aged Taftâni master will enter Jerusalem, Riyadh or Isfahan and perform a public Weaving of such enormity that the world will be denied forever the luxury of their disbelief and never again doubt the existence of magic. If such a thing has not been done by the time I reach my senescence — *if* I reach senescence — you can bet that that wizard will be me.

Other Entities



Traditions

Noble champions of Truth and Magic in the modern age? Or cowards so ashamed of what they are that they dim their flame almost until it goes out? We are underwhelmed. I say this: if you're going to flame, my brothers, flame brightly. The mighty wizards of the Tradition Council have been reduced to making their great magics look like lucky accidents, and by so doing, they have become the betrayers of magic. Yes Paradox hurts, but that's no reason not to do glorious, flagrant magic.

And who are these Traditionalists, anyway? Looking at them these days I'd be inclined to say they were a rather hopeless lot. No wonder the Technocracy is crushing them.

Some we have encountered, some we have not.

Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts

Some of these so-called "Traditions" are so well established that they go back all of, what, a hundred years? That's not a Tradition, it's a phase.

Celestial Chorus

The monotheists? Oh, please. The very notion that there is but a single god is so ludicrous that it strains credibility. It was stupid when the Hebrews spouted it, it was stupid when the Christians spouted it, and when the Muslims spout it, not only is it stupid, but the fervor with which they do it takes the whole stupid concept to whole new levels of rabidity. Monotheism is much too limited to explain the sweet fullness of life's experience.

Order of Hermes

Most disappointing are the Hermetics. Theirs was a noble and respectable consortium, if a bit on the stiff and academic side. To see them brought to this new low is quite sad. Yes, there may be more of them than there are of us, but at least we have not shamed our noble past.

Dreamspeakers

Why whine at the spirits when you can command them? How do you expect them to respect you?

Euthanatoi

They were noble opponents once. They certainly made it clear that we were not welcome in India, and they met us in combat and repelled us. We respect that. Where once they were gods of death, they have now been reduced to starving vultures.

Cult of Ecstasy

If a man's thumb is infected he knows it, but when a man's mind is infected, he cannot tell you that. You cannot serve the ends of Asha with a clouded mind. If your thoughts are twisted with insanity and intoxicants, you cannot hope to serve any cause, no less the noble cause of Truth. If you cannot focus enough to speak a coherent sentence, how can you hope to channel your will sufficiently to act decisively or perform magic? The very concept is ludicrous. It's like claiming you want to build a fire and then promptly throwing the wood into a well.

Technocracy

There was a time when they were like us. They were simple viziers who crafted fine goods through which to work their magic. Somehow, they lost track of the fact that it was the magical inspiration that was important, not the work itself. Now their reliance on their tools has made them pathetic. Not only do they quash the magical spark of Truth in themselves, but they have the audacity to quash it in others as well. They've won the war, but for what? So they can keep human inspiration in chains? That is utterly unacceptable. When the time is right and our numbers are strong, we will strive against them in a jihad the likes of which they've not seen, and we will make magic the pinnacle of human achievement that it should be.

Nephandi

We found them repulsive before the Devil-King Age and we find them even more so now. There is no depravity they will not willingly sink to, no filth they will not hold close to them in the pursuit of power. They are the high priests to Druj, the soldiers of disorder, Falsehood and injustice. Where we are light and fire and truth, they are darkness and slime and lies. Beware their filthy tongues.

Marauders

In the kingdom of the blind, they call the sighted man mad. To our way of thinking, madness is not so high a price to pay for Truth. We revere these so-called Marauders for their willingness and ability to reveal Asha at any time and any place they see fit. Even more than we, the Marauders are in the forefront on the War for Asha and *jashan*. On the other hand, they really do seem to be utterly lacking in the clarity of mind that we value so highly. While our weaving has helped us

balance Truth and the realities of the modern world, they have no such focus and they perform magic with no discernable point, and using Asha for questionable ends is just as reprehensible as avoiding its use altogether. Revere these mad ones, support them if you believe in what they're doing, but if their lack of clarity and focus makes them intolerably dangerous, try to nudge them to where their mad exuberance will do the most damage to the enemies of magic.

Vaimpires

We are both repulsed and impressed by these clever *ghuls*. That such foul creatures have managed to thwart all efforts to eradicate them gives us hope that our own struggle to adapt to the modern world (or make it adapt to us) is not hopeless.

That said, they are such clear servants of Druj that we cannot suffer their existence. What luck, then, that fire, our favored tool, is so effective against them.

Changers

Most of them seem to strive, in their own misguided way, toward Asha, but we don't see many of them. It's better that way. The games we play seem to be a bit rough for them. Those changers who have fallen to Druj, on the other hand, are dangerous and foul. On the bright side, they burn readily.

Hunters

The newest soldiers of Falsehood have only appeared recently, and already they have earned our hatred. They target those dedicated to revealing Truth through magic, and they murdered my apprentice for absolutely no reason. Do not even try to reason with them, but burn upon sight these *dregvanti* with the fire of Truth and enjoy the sound of their fat sizzling. They must certainly be agents of either the Nephandi or the Technocracy intent on wiping out Truth on Earth. They seem to have difficulty dealing with Menog. Do not hesitate to use that advantage.

Mummies

Something strange has happened with the Undying Ones. These are not the same Undying Ones that we have known for millennia. Not only do these seem to be more potent than their progenitors (and, alas, more confused it seems), but they seem also to be tireless agents of Asha, and it is our privilege to do battle beside them.

Organization (or Chaos)



Taftâni organization is a quick and simple subject: There is none. This, more than any conflicts they may have with the Technocracy or the dominant paradigm, effectively renders them moot in the modern world. The same confidence, strength of conviction and ego that allows our crafts to reveal Truth and work magic also makes cooperation next to impossible. A Weaver is a solitary soul who spends his hours practicing his crafts, protecting the world from the thrice-cursed djinn, servants of druj that they are, and stoking his thought-fire ever higher by meditating on Asha (Truth).

Under typical circumstances, the only time a Taftâni is in the company of another Taftâni (or, for that matter, anyone else) for any length of time is during the apprenticeship stage. Taking an apprentice is seen as a high obligation for a Weaver because it is how he passes on the experience of Asha before he crosses into the afterworld.

When Taftâni meet in combat, it is generally a joyful, incendiary and lethal celebration of their joint love of conflict. In the Weavers' view of the world, everything is based on conflict, and combat is nothing more than an opportunity to take part in the omnibeneficent struggle of the universe. They are dangerously skilled in the arts of conflict. Taftâni battlefields are easy to spot: nothing is left alive, the sand is fused into glass and blackened husks of once beautiful hand-crafted items are strewn about like so much refuse. Two other things commonly at the site of a Taftâni conflict: a weeping mage and the charred remains of his opponent.

Other mages who stumble onto such sights are at a loss to explain the situation, but the gist of the situation is generally something like this: Imru al-Qays and Tarafa al-Mutazzi are old acquaintances. They know each other from *haram* gatherings where they have drunk wine together and discussed the generally grim state of the world. They meet while pursuing similar, but slightly conflicting goals, they argue briefly and then explode into combat — more out of knee-jerk competitiveness and a love of conflict than from any true malice. Tarafa blasts Imru to cinders and after a brief moment of delight and flaring ego, Tarafa al-Mutazzi suddenly realizes that he has just killed one of the few people who understands Asha as he does, whom he might also have called a friend at some point under

slightly different circumstances. He weeps and laments his rash behavior; he subsequently composes elegies to his dead opponent and writes a great deal of poetry addressing the folly of slaying members of one's own tribe. He spends the next month in a horrible mood and thereafter forgets about the whole experience as much as he is able.

Taftâni Haram

Despite their native disinclination to engage in any form of social interaction, Taftâni realize the necessity of remaining in contact with others of their "tribe." Every six months the Taftâni choose a meeting place and declare it *haram* or "sanctuary." Djinn are dispatched to notify all known practitioners of Taftâni magic and the curmudgeonly sand wizards converge for a meeting that is part brag-fest, part business meeting and part raucous party. One quarter to one half of the Taftâni "tribe" show up at any given *haram*, but over time these gatherings insure that most Taftâni know each other.

The key to allowing Taftâni to gather is to keep the *haram* sacrosanct. No hostilities are allowed for three days before or after a *haram*, and woe to the Weaver who breaks this commandment. The penalty for breaking the *haram* is undergoing a lengthy magical trial by ordeal that is made as lengthy and excruciating as the Forces, Life, Mind and Time Spheres can make it. For that reason no *haram* has been violated since the punishment of Zuhayr ibn Abi Jaffar (who has since been renamed Zuhayr the Screamer by the Sha'ir) in 1670.

The penalty for breaking *haram* is this harsh only because it must be. Taftâni revel in conflict and are skilled magical combatants. On the other hand, they aren't quite so skilled when it comes to interacting in a pro-social setting. When Taftâni cross paths for discussion of Craft matters it is initially an uncomfortable thing. There is a pervading sense that social niceties are a manifestation of *druj*, or Falsehood and

[illegible] are few and far between. Ironically, once the [illegible] has been broken, the Weavers are hearty in their backslapping, and they will laugh, drink, brag about their apprentices and tell dirty jokes for hours on end.

There are few enough Taftâni in the world these days that most of them have at least met one another and many have extended history together of one sort or another. Most Weavers can match their colleagues with their apprentices without difficulty.

Once the knee-jerk combativeness of the Taftâni has been largely disarmed, the business of the *haram* begins. The magi discuss patterns in the behavior of the djinn, disruptions or changes in the Invisible World, which places in the world seem to be most cut off from Asha (i.e., where Static Reality is harshest on those who perform magic), and which Taftâni have crossed the Diinvat and what effect their sacrifice had on the ability to use magic in the vicinity.

Results of a *haram* can take the form of anything from a few mages agreeing to work together to prove the truth of things to the inhabitants of a certain region to a group of apprentices being sent to the Invisible World to party with certain notable djinn as a lesson in djinn dossing. Whatever results, it will happen in a Taftâni fashion, which is to say, in the sweet fullness of time.

When the *haram* is done, more carousing has been done than business, but that seems not to bother the Taftâni, leading some to speculate that Weavers are really much more social than they let on.

Tutelage



The Taftâni's Apprentice

The relationship between a Taftâni master and his apprentice is a highly formal arrangement between the mage and the pupil that begins as little more than a business transaction and, generally, winds up resembling both the relationship between parent and child and that between lovers.

Weavers are fully cognizant of the value of their magical knowledge, and they insist on compensatory service from those they teach, otherwise it isn't worth the irritation that comes from educating the ignorant. Hermits that they are, Weavers on the whole are torn between cultivating their precious solitude and fulfilling what they see as their duty to the long and glorious mystical history of Taftâni magic. The standard Taftâni approach is to make the most of an unpleasant duty.

The typical tack taken by Weavers is to take on an apprentice who is young, generally between the ages of eleven and sixteen, and teach her the fundamentals of the craft until she either dies, masters the basics of the Spheres, or bests her mentor in mystic combat. In no way is the apprenticeship an undertaking to be entered into lightly.

Taftâni masters are generally recognized in the villages near the Empty Quarter and other places where the Weavers reside. When they choose to take an apprentice, they let it be known by one means or another. The mage may do this directly, or he may recruit some well-connected individual from a village to spread the word through her network of acquaintances. Most villages around the Empty Quarter aren't particularly large, though, so word travels quickly. Once the word goes out, parents who suspect that their child may have mystical talent (i.e., if the child sees spirits or has a penchant for rhyming and metrical speech) — or those who just want to be rid of troublesome offspring — will contact the Weaver and invite him in for mint tea (and usually give him a small gift of some sort to make the visit worth his while).

The mage first talks with the parents, inquiring why they want to foist their offspring off on a feeble old magician. This is the parents' cue to tell the Weaver A) how brilliant and respected he is, and B) that all the omens, portents and the like point to the fact that their child is magically gifted and phenomenally so. After the Weaver questions the parents, they bring in their child, and the wizard questions the aspirant and gauges his mystical aptitudes by examining him with Spirit and Mind magics. Most will also check for general physical health and for long life and grand destiny (using Time and Entropy sight, assuring that many Taftâni have the Destiny Background). If the Weaver feels that the candidate has the requisite potential (and even in the troubled modern world, the Taftâni are notorious for turning away all but the most qualified aspirants), he will explain in painstaking and graphic detail what will be expected of him as a Taftâni apprentice: the trials, the effort, the personal sacrifices...and the power. The Weaver stresses the drudgery of apprenticeship in an attempt to discourage all but the most determined. The candidate may refuse the offer at this stage, and if he does, he will never again be considered for apprenticeship by that mage. If he accepts, he packs a week's worth of clothing, bids a final farewell to his parents and the life he has known and disappears into the desert to learn the secrets of weaving magic. Once he leaves his home, there are only two ways out of the Taftâni's service: success (as represented by the acquisition of his sixth dot in Sphere magic) or death (typically from Paradox, conflicts with *djinn*, or magical duels with other apprentices). Taftâni apprentices are referred to as the son of their master to stress the strong bond between master and apprentice. If Raschid is the apprentice of Ahmed, his formal name will be Raschid ibn Ahmed: Raschid, son of Ahmed.

Recent decades have found the supply of potential apprentices drying up as the old ways are more and more often forgotten. This has left the Taftâni either sorely pressed or entirely unable to find suitable apprentices through the usual means. What good fortune, then, that a new source of apprentices has been yielding an ever-increasing pool of candidates: runaways. Children or adolescents who are outcasts, for whatever reason, or those who find themselves overly skeptical of Islam, may follow up on the legends they have heard of powerful wizards lurking in the wastelands. Despite knowing what they're looking for, they still manage to be surprised when they manage to stumble across a weaver in a sandstorm (or vice versa). Weavers have a particular respect for those apprentices who have run away to find them. It indicates a certain level of stubbornness, self-reliance and resourcefulness; three traits needed in abundance by those stepping onto the Taftâni path.

At the initial stages of his training, the Taftâni apprentice is little more than a slave. He takes on the responsibility of being the master's butler, cook, storyteller and sexual partner. This last bit, of course, is viewed as scandalous and obscene by Muslims and most of the West, but the tradition of Arabic pederasty is far older than Islam, and most Weavers, who were themselves apprentices at one point, feel it is an important part of the apprenticeship, if only as a way for the pupil to give something of value to the master for his training, or, as the Taftâni phrase it, "The beauty of youth feeds the wrinkles of wisdom even as the wisdom of age starves the folly of youth."

In exchange for all this, Taftâni apprentices receive room, board, tutelage in half a dozen non-mystical skills, intensive mystical training and sponsorship into the — albeit limited — social milieu of the Taftâni. Taftâni masters take their role as *wali* or "guardian" very seriously. Insulting, harming or interfering with a Taftâni apprentice in any way is the surest way to bring down the full wrath of the mage and all the djinn at his command.

Traditionally, a Taftâni takes only one apprentice at a time, and rarely mentors more than two or three apprentices in his lifetime. Times being what they are, however, it is not unheard of for a mage to take on two or even three apprentices at once (should circum-

stances so dictate). Weavers prefer short apprenticeships. A talented student who dedicates his every waking moment to the various studies given to him by his teacher can master the basics of Taftâni magic in as little as four year's time.

If one Taftâni kills another in battle, the victor is *strongly* obligated to take over the magical education of his opponent's apprentice.

The *haram* is an exceedingly important testing ground for Taftâni apprentices. It is where they meet their master's colleagues, and when an apprentice is about to graduate from his apprenticeship, it is where the master brags about his apprentice's accomplishments and formally wishes the young mage well. When a Weaver dies, it is the task of his former (or current) apprentice (or apprentices) to inform the "tribe" of that fact in the form of a poetic eulogy (*madin*) that is added to the body of Taftâni poetics. Apprentices are frequently called upon during the *haram* to discuss philosophy, read poetry or show off their latest magical creation. It is easy for a Taftâni apprentice to feel like a show pony at a *haram*, but the benefits of reflecting well on one's master are indisputable and manifold, and many good things come to apprentices who garner praise for their master.

Taftâni, as a general rule, have a deeply paternal streak, and they are almost always insanely protective of their charges. The slow revelation of Asha is extremely complex, and Taftâni have nightmares about not enlightening their charges properly. Almost as frequent is the nightmare of some misfortune striking down the apprentice, thereby rendering the Taftâni's sacrifice pointless. For these reasons, awliya keep extremely close tabs on their apprentices. Any and all threats to the apprentice are taken with extreme gravity, and if the vizier has to incinerate someone to protect his apprentice, then so shall it be.

Once the apprentice begins performing magical feats that would be considered vulgar in regular civilization, the wali becomes almost hyper-vigilant, lest the apprentice slip away to show off his new skills and die from the Paradox backlash.

At the end of the apprenticeship, the master will take his apprentice to a gathering of local Taftâni mages and introduce him to his new peers (what few remain). If the apprentice served particularly well, his former master may also gift him with a *djinn* servitor (treat as a Familiar as per page 67 of the **Mage Storytellers Companion**); at that time, the apprentice has become an initiate and is free to weave as he pleases.

Taftâni Specialties

The Taftâni, like any other Tradition, have their own peculiar forms of Awakened magic (though the concept of the Traditions' Spheres doesn't always mesh with their studies). While this doesn't mean that they use only these facets of their particular Spheres, they are the ones that the Tradition is most renowned for, and the one that most Taftâni *awliya* make a point of teaching their apprentices.

Correspondence: On the whole, Taftâni don't hold the Correspondence Sphere in particularly high esteem. Either faction may make use of it, but it's generally not used for much beyond simple transportation across the vast distances (from Afghanistan to Turkey, for example) that Taftâni frequently need to cover. Taftâni also specialize in the Warding aspects of the Correspondence Sphere, most commonly to keep djinn out of certain areas and to prevent Technocratic spying.

Entropy: The Zaotar faction rarely uses Entropy. When they do, they specialize in Chaos — breaking down patterns, knocking stability out from underneath their enemies' feet, and destroying their enemies' tools. Most Zaotar, however, feel that accomplishing things through "accidents" reeks of druj or falsehood, and they neglect Entropy when they find that they can get the same general effect with the vulgar Forces magic that delights them so much.

The Kahin are a different story. They're drawn to the Sphere of Entropy like white trash to game shows. They specialize in Fate, Fortune and Cursing, but any and all elements of the Entropy Sphere fascinate them, and they wield it with devastating efficiency.

Forces: This Sphere, more than any other, illustrates the Taftâni inclination toward blunt conflict. The Zaotar revel in the Primal Elements of fire and electricity while others prefer dramatic weather control Effects. Zaotar frequently capture destructive elemental phenomena like lightning, storms and fire in vessels just as they do with djinn (though this can also be done with the Spirit Sphere, as described below), so a powerful Taftâni mage might uncork a flask of storms or shatter against a rock a bottle full of earthquake. Since Asha (Truth) is often perceived as fire, that is perceived as the purest element and the one most Zaotar use in combat.

Those Kahin who use Forces tend to do so in a manner that fits with their eerie, otherworldly natures. They may chant a poem to bring down meteor storms upon their enemies or declaim an angry Jeremiad against a Technocratic oppressor as a means of calling down lightning upon him. Kahin, for the most part, eschew such direct attacks, preferring to curse their targets with Entropy and let Qismat torment the victim as it sees fit.

Life: Zaotar and Kahin both make occasional use of Life magic, though they very rarely explore its effects above the third rank. Once a Taftâni is capable of using the Life Sphere to heal himself or wound his enemies, he rarely feels the need to delve into its mysteries much further.

Matter: Matter is among the Spheres used least by the Taftâni. The Zaotar see matter as energy that has been trapped or otherwise compromised, and they generally choose Forces Effects over Matter Effects with reliable frequency. The exception to this tendency is the Taftâni who uses Matter to work her crafts. A Taftâni glassblower, for example, might use a Matter Effect to make his glass bottles bulletproof or lighter than air. Alternatively, Matter comes in very handy when a Taftâni is constructing her lavish sanctum; it's much easier to transmute sand into gems than to mine or — gods forbid — *buy* them.

Kahin simply find Matter too base a tool, preferring to work with such rarified media as thought and destiny. That's not to say, however, that they're above using Matter Effects occasionally to build curses into certain items that they've crafted.

Mind: Illusions, learned from the djinn. Both Zaotar and Kahin Taftâni enjoy using Mind magic to create illusions or otherwise misguide or confuse their enemies. In all probability, this inclination came about from their extensive dealings with the djinn, who are, themselves, masters of deception.

Kahin specialize a great deal in Mind magic, including communication, astral travel and various forms of oneiric manipulation.

Prime: Most Taftâni have at least one dot in Prime to give them Prime sight, which they consider the most direct means of sensing Asha, or Truth. It allows them to watch the flow of magic around them, making it easier for them to wield it, should they so choose. Many Taftâni use rank two Prime Effects to invest their crafts with Quintessence and power their Forces Effects. In any case, Creation is the specialty most Taftâni choose when working with the Prime Sphere.

Spirit: Both factions of the Taftâni make heavy use of the Spirit Sphere and specialize almost exclusively in Djinn and Spirit Dealings. Those that deal in binding more powerful spirits and djinn specialize also in uncovering the true names of various old powerful spirits as a means of gaining control over them. Having a Spirit's true name is essentially the same as having its heart: both grant you absolute control.

The Zaotar use djinn as slaves and artillery; when a Zaotar chooses to build a home (or a city, for that matter), it tends to be the djinn who do the work. Likewise, when a Zaotar is in combat, he likes to distract his opponent with bright sprays of fire while his djinn servitors attack the enemy from behind.

The more subtle Kahin use djinn predominantly as assassins and informants, and make greater use of other types of Spirits as well. Many of the Effects the Zaotar gets from the Forces Sphere, a Kahin might be more inclined to get with Spirit. While a Zaotar might use a Forces Effect to call down lightning on his opponent, a Kahin might recite a war chant to a storm spirit to achieve the same effect. Zaotar prefer the more powerful and direct attacks of the Forces Sphere while Kahin like the flexibility they get from controlling a variety of Spirits.

Neither faction uses Spirit magic much to enter the Invisible World themselves, largely because the Solomonic Code—the principles upon which most Taftâni Spirit magic is based—do not work in the Umbra. That's not to say that Taftâni can't use older forms of Spirit magic to entreat or trick spirits into doing their will... but Taftâni, the Zaotar in particular, are extremely hesitant to interact with spirits (djinn in particular) on any but a master and slave model — something that doesn't work nearly as well without the Solomonic Code backing them up.

Time: Zaotar pursue the Time Sphere at the lower levels as an academic interest only, if at all. It doesn't have the impressive whiz-bang impact that they get from other Spheres. However, those Zaotar who advance to higher rank Time Effects specialize in Temporal Manipulation. They particularly revel in the ability to stop time in the middle of a fierce battle and slay their enemies in the moments between heartbeats. In the old days of Taftâni wizard battles, it was not uncommon for whole battlefields full of warring soldiers to drop at once, as a Time-meddling Taftâni wizard popped back into the time stream after slashing the throats of every single opponent.

Kahin, on the other hand, love the Time Sphere, use it frequently in their Effects and specialize in Divination.

Poetry and Power

Among the most powerful of the Weavers' foci, poetry plays a role in many spells worked by the Taftâni. Poetry is one of the most important forms of artistic expression among Arabic peoples, and this has so influenced the cultures around the Taftâni that it is now part of the Taftâni Tradition as well. The Taftâni have long held that the extended recitation of highly formal poetry allows the Weaver to enter an ecstatic state that grants direct access to the universe's occult workings (Asha). Through the focus of the trance and the music of the poem, the Taftâni's word ceases to be a representation of reality and becomes reality itself. Chanting stretches the words like threads through which the Taftâni weaves magic.

The Arabic term for poet is *sha'ir*, meaning "one who knows." The knowledge of the Taftâni poet is his knowledge of spirits and the flow of Qismat. The sha'ir are believed to receive their insights and wisdom from the spirit world, primarily from the *djinn*. This relationship with Menog (the Invisible World and the beings who reside there) makes the poet a mysterious, frightening and potentially dangerous figure in Arabic culture.

Those skilled in the use of poetry are believed to imbue their every utterance with supernatural weight and power, and the lengthy history of the Taftâni includes almost innumerable accounts of oracles and poet-seers whose blessings or curses carry enormous weight.

The ability to compose and recite poetry is considered by Weavers to be one of the major prerequisites for working magic. If a child born into an Arabic family (one not overly attendant to the dictates of Islam) shows a particular aptitude for rhyming or metrical speech, the family will announce the fact far and wide, hoping to bring the child to the attention of whatever mage or spirits may be near so that he may become apprenticed to a Weaver.

While most sha'ir become Kahin and enter their trances to feel the flow of Qismat and speak with spirits, this is not always the case. Taftâni lore is full of accounts of sha'ir who recite storm poetry to the sky and have lightning strike down their enemies, or speak lengthy denunciations of their enemies who suddenly burst into flame.

Just because a Taftâni doesn't have a number of bottles, flasks, weapons and tools on him does not at all mean that he is helpless by any stretch of the imagination.

Internal Politics & Justice



Frontier Justice

Just as there is very little organization among the Taftâni, so is there very little sanctioned justice. There are no courts, no tribunals, no overseers, no governors, no police...essentially, no authority of any sort. Taftâni hate *nothing* so much as they hate authority. The Taftâni mindset rebels at anything that seeks to control it, thus the Weavers live in a state of not-particularly-enlightened anarchy. For the most part, Taftâni are willing to recognize the Traditions of Hospitality, which is the only thing preventing many Taftâni from killing their apprentices at times, but aside from that, "Do what thou wilt" is the whole of Taftâni law.

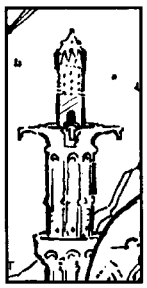
Taftâni *justice*, on the other hand, is a very real and harsh fact of life indeed. Anyone who slights, offends, assaults or attacks a Taftâni or his apprentice had better be up to the task of defending himself, because there is nothing more dangerous than an enraged enemy eager to use vulgar magic in pursuit of vengeance.

Zaotar will fry an opponent while the Kahin poison their fate with curses. In either case, the results are not pretty. It's been said that an armed society is a polite society, and that may be true, but in the case of the Taftâni, an armed society creates a scattered group of disconnected isolates.

The duel is the premier mode of settling differences between Taftâni. Duels are not particularly formalized. Generally a Taftâni duel will include five people: the duelists, one ally for each duelist (ideally a powerful back-up or avenger, but almost always an apprentice), and "Asha's Eyes," a qualified mage — though not necessarily a Taftâni — who can ascertain that any result was obtained through fair means. Other than that, Taftâni duels are chaos incarnate. Storms, earthquakes, fireballs, rains of fire, frogs and swords are all relatively common. Summoned *ghuls*, spirits of malice, demons,

angels, fomori, ghosts, fairies and djinn gladiators have all been used as combatants in Taftâni duels. Duels between Kahin, on the other hand, frequently seem calm in comparison, but the muttering of curses and counter-curses goes back and forth like a fatal tennis match until one (or sometimes both) Kahin fall prey to the hexes bestowed by his opponent. Duels between Zaotar and Kahin are rare, and when they do happen, they're very short. In the time that it takes a Zaotar to work up one nice big-ass fireball, the Kahin typically lands a curse powerful enough to shatter every bone in the Zaotar's body, blind him, make him agoraphobic and inflict him with tertiary syphilis. And he's also made sure that the Zaotar's fireball goes off prematurely.

Factions



As the Taftâni are few in the modern age, they have little room for factions. Any given individual Taftâni probably owes more to personal predilection than to the tutelage of a specific faction of beliefs. Two broad philosophical schools define the most common divide among Taftâni, but there's no guarantee that thinkers of either stripe necessarily commune with one another any more peaceably than normal for the Craft.

Zaotar — Playing with Fire

The most obvious and clearly recognizable Taftâni (and therefore those with the shortest life expectancy) are those of the Zaotar faction. Zaotars are the Taftâni whose life philosophy translates loosely to "If it troubles you, blow it up." Zaotar are the loud, brash, obnoxious, egoistic warmongers that most people think of when they think of Taftâni mages.

Zaotar revel in the use of vulgar Forces Effects, not so much out of their egoism, however, but out of a deep-rooted belief that coincidental magic is the way of the *dregvant* or "follower of Falsehood." They do not see themselves as belligerent, but as deeply noble warriors for magic and Truth. In their eyes, the Zaotar are displaying a level of integrity that other mages are unwilling (or unable) to show out of fear or weakness.

Their biggest drawback, however, is that their pride runs unchecked. The headstrong, stubborn na-



ture of the Zaotar leads them to bang their heads against walls that even their thick skulls can't smash through.

While the Zaotar are easy to parody, it should be noted that their ego and warlike nature flow logically from their most deeply-rooted philosophies. Bear in mind that the Zaotar are caught between unyielding idealism and merciless reality; to play them as clowns minimizes the drama inherent in their situation and turns what could be an interesting roleplaying experience into an exercise in one-dimensional tedium.

Anything a Zaotar can't quite get done with the Forces Sphere, she's more than happy to have a djinni do. Zaotar like to have a number of djinn under their control at any given time, and know the ways of the djinn well. An old and powerful Zaotar might have as many as thirty djinn under his command at a time, while the newly trained Taftâni apprentice may have one if he's lucky.

Zaotar make heavy use of their crafts in their magic. The glass bottles they blow, the metal flasks, weapons, and tools that they forge and the pottery they craft are all imbued with magic and help focus their magic in return.

Kahin — Shaking the Hand of Fate

The poetic focus of the Taftâni is taken to its extreme by the *Kahin*, the soothsayers and diviners among the Weavers. The *Kahin* practice a form of primal magic more akin to that of Dreamspeakers or Ecstatics, whereby the chanting of poetry or rhymed prose allows them to attune themselves to their surroundings and those around them. While in this trance state, a *Kahin* can divine the future, heal or harm others or locate lost items (most often camels).

Whereas the Zaotar prefer working flashy and spectacular magic (i.e., using Spirit, Forces and Prime), the *Kahin* tend to be more reserved and possess a more esoteric and mystical bent. Unlike most Taftâni, the *Kahin* pursue the relatively less blatant study of Qismat in all its forms (as expressed in the Spheres of Entropy, Mind, and Time). Ironically, while only a tiny fraction of Taftâni initiates opt to study the ways of the poet-seers, they currently account for a large portion of the craft due to their notably longer life expectancy.

Unlike the Zaotar, Kahin appear to suppress their ego to their mystical studies. Most Kahin are *at least* as quiet, odd and mystical as their Zaotar brethren are loud and egoistic. Kahin gravitate to the odder elements of any culture they find themselves in. They hold that Qismat, pain and death are among the greatest mysteries known to humanity, and where there are mysteries, there is power—a sharp departure from the outlook of the Zaotar.

That said, there's still no mistaking that the Zaotar and Kahin are from the same Tradition. Both factions evolved from Persian mystics, both share the belief that the conflict between Asha and Druj is the basis for all of the Tellurian, and both firmly believe in using craft as a counterbalance to the otherwise wild magic that they perform. The *Kahin* are not an actual offshoot of the Taftâni; it's more accurate to say that they are specialists. *Kahin* still have Spirit as their specialty Sphere and they still have a pronounced tendency toward vulgar Effects, but compared to the average flame-spewing *djinn*-jocky, the *Kahin* seem quite mild-mannered. As they get older, however, most *Kahin* do become increasingly more mystical in their outlook, and they may get so wrapped up in the study and manipulation of Qismat that they begin to lose interest in the Invisible World and its inhabitants.

The particular power of the *sha'ir* is thought to be in his ability to bless friends and curse and deleteriously insult enemies. A Taftâni typically commands *djinn* through rhymed and metrical prose. Likewise, a *Kahin* who brands an enemy with a cunningly contrived nickname (attached with a coincidental Entropy/Mind rote) can induce a curse on an adversary that will last his lifetime (See *Sha'ir* 's Sentence, below). Alternatively, an angry Kahin can skip the niceties and simply recite a devastating poetic curse (•••• Entropy) that can cripple or even kill its target.

In the presence of a *Kahin*, sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can strike you dead.

Paradigm & Foci



The Fire of Truth

Know this: There is no higher virtue than Asha (or Truth). It is the foundation, the very essence of magic. That which reveals Truth to the unenlightened is magic. That which obscures or denies Truth is druj (or evil and falsehood). All of life is a dance between these two poles because all of life is generated by the cataclysmic struggle between Asha and druj.

The primary symbol of Truth for the Taftâni is fire. Anything that reveals Truth, conveys Truth or burns away that which obscures Truth is considered fire, either literal or metaphorical. When referring to the thought-fire that purifies minds or to the fire channeled through

the will to produce magic, that fire is called *atar*. Those Taftâni who are most aggressive in revealing Truth, doing magic or acting decisively are considered to be driven by an inner fire. Taftâni who identify as Kahin (seers) are said to possess *atar* bright enough to illuminate even the vast uncertainty of the future.

Taftâni philosophy is founded on the belief that Truth reveals itself through three distinct faces (called the three *atars*): Clear thought, direct action, and the use of magic—the understanding of each predicated on mastery of the previous principle. The three *atars* are the principles by which the Taftâni live and die.

Clear thought is the necessary foundation for the two subsequent fires. Only a mind purified by *atar* is capable of the direct experience of Asha that makes decisive action and magic possible. The Taftâni teach that, for an individual to exercise free choice intelligently, he must burn away uncertainty or lack of clarity by making his mind like unto a blazing flame. Taftâni hold that this sacred *asha* — thought fire — brings lucidity, guidance and joy to the *ashavant*, or soldier of Truth, while burning the *dregvant*, or soldier of Falsehood. Anything that clouds the senses or obscures thought (drugs, alcohol, senility, mental illness) is an abomination that must be burned from the mind of any individual who aspires to Enlightenment (Weavers take particular exception to a great deal of Ecstatic magical praxis for this exact reason).

The Weavers' notion of clear thought combines notions of rational cognition, creativity and insight into others. A Westerner's take on the Taftâni is that they have extremely well calibrated bullshit detectors, and they have no qualms whatsoever about pointing out when another's thought processes appear less than sharp. It's one of the many things that make Taftâni wizards difficult to deal with (and one of the prime reasons they so frequently tend to be loners).

That said, the Taftâni don't expect much from those who don't seek Enlightenment, and if "commoners" insist on alienating themselves from the warmth of Truth, that's their problem. Furthermore, Weavers are by no means above or averse to *fostering* uncertainty and lack of clarity in others. While a handful of more idealistic Taftâni espouse the necessity of bringing everyone closer to Truth, many more Weavers—cynical to the core—claim not only that Truth can not be shown to everyone, but that attempting to do so has the effect of cheapening Truth itself. ("Small flames are snuffed by a strong wind, but that same wind will only fan the true fire to greater heat and radiance.") Taftâni at this extreme of the continuum claim that if an enemy is fool enough to ingest substances that adversely affect her perception of reality, then she simply aids in their cause. Such a vice is just one more means of allowing fools to weaken themselves and fall from the ranks of those who know Truth. Afghan Weavers, in particular, are notorious for propping up — and thriving on the profits of — the opium trade. While they claim that they do so primarily as a means of identifying and culling the weak of will, others note that they don't seem to have any problem with the enormous quantities of money that come with giving the weak-minded the drugs they crave.

Dying for Purity

If a Taftâni mage believes that her ability to perceive, serve and represent Truth has been irreparably compromised, she is obligated to pass along her belongings, magical creations and djinn servitors to an apprentice (or apprentices), and make final atonement before sacrificing herself in some grand (and generally fiery) demonstration of Truth in front of a crowd of the unenlightened. This act is called *chinvat*, a Pahlavi word meaning "bridge over the abyss," referring to the bridge by which the soul enters the afterlife.

This is generally done only under three circumstances:

1. The Taftâni's ability to think clearly becomes impaired through some effect of the physical world outside of the mage (i.e., the mage becomes addicted to some sort of chemical, like alcohol or opium, that impairs clear thought).

2. The Taftâni's ability to think rationally is called into question due to meddling from some supernatural force outside of the mage (i.e., control by another mage or by an entity in the Invisible World).

3. The Taftâni's ability to think clearly suffers from some form of infirmity originating within the mage himself (i.e. mental illness or senility). These conditions are extremely rare. Due to their emphasis on clarity and their strong reality principle, Taftâni almost never suffer from mental illness. Senility is likewise rare as very few Weavers in the modern world live long enough for senility to be problematic.

The mage's final display of Truth is generally some necessary deed that results in the mage accruing fatal amounts of Paradox. Young Taftâni frequently spend hours imagining the form of their own possible demise, should such a feat become an eventual necessity; indeed, there's occasionally some competition to devise a feat so profound and far-reaching that it might become a legend among Taftâni.

Once a Weaver has mastered the first fire (*atar*, or purified thought), he strives to channel his clear thought into action. Action inspired by the fire of truth is decisive, direct and unflinching. Taftâni wizards occasionally seem hesitant to act because they know that when they *do* act, it is likely to be absolute and final.

Direct action is aimed at a specific outcome, and no compromise is allowed. Fire, as any Taftâni will pointedly explain at the slightest provocation, does not compromise; an image popular in Taftâni iconography is that of a fire burning its way through the bottom of a wooden bowl filled with water; the flame will be extinguished by its own success, yet it burns no less hotly for that. If a clear-sighted Taftâni comes to the conclusion that a certain course of action is necessary while his mind is pure, then the Weaver is obligated to complete that objective regardless of the consequences to himself or others. The Taftânis' goal is to bring realization of Asha to all minds, that they may all feel the hot clarity brought by atar, or thought-fire.

No Taftâni will *ever* apologize for his actions, as doing so would be akin to apologizing that the sun is too bright. What is *is* and cannot be apologized for. The struggle between Asha and druj will have many casualties, but that is not the fault of the Weavers. If an ally or bystander gets burned, literally or figuratively, then they should have known better than to be near such a bright flame — literal or figurative.

The Persian term for this kind of uncompromising direct action is Haurvatat, meaning "integrity," and it is believed to be Asha revealed through deeds, which must, in turn, stem from *atar*, the state of flame-purified mind.

Magic, on the other hand, is fire or Truth channeled through the human will — explaining, in part, the Taftâni love of Forces magic. The greater the displays of magic performed by a Weaver, the greater his understanding, or, as the Taftâni phrase it: "the greater the knowledge, the brighter the flame."

To the Weavers, the true masters of magic are the *ashavant*, or Truth-tellers. They revel in their use of magic, preferably the flashiest and most vulgar effects possible. In the Taftâni world view, anything other than the willful use of vulgar magic is seen as complicity with the Technocratic agenda, and those who refuse to use vulgar magic are *dregvant*, or followers of lies.

We have one goal: the direct understanding of Asha through clear thought, direct action and channeling Truth-flame (atar) through our will to affect the world around us. All that we do revolves around Truth: how it manifests, how it flows (and by extension how its flow may be curtailed), how Truth is perceived and how a deep knowledge of the patterns of the universe can grant direct access to Truth.

Know, then, that everything you see, every experience you have ever had, is generated by your experience of the clash of Asha and druj. Druj, or falsehood, is everywhere, while Asha can only come into the world through the minds of the Enlightened. Asha cannot be sensed with the senses, it can only be discerned through clear thought in a purified mind.

While we are not currently a recognized Tradition, our legitimacy with the Council of Nine has waxed and waned with the passage of time. Their thinking and our thinking have impacted each other. While we don't entirely buy into their notion of the nine Spheres, we're not blind to the advantages of a convenient and elegant model, and it's not terribly far from Truth. We simply think of the Spheres in relation to Truth, the one principle from which all others flow.

I am told by the Traditionalists that Truth is simply our name for yet another wretched mystic Sphere. We do not think of Truth as a tenth Sphere, per se, but as the one Sphere of which the common nine are simply facets or descriptors — when we bother to use the Traditions' notion of Spheres at all.

Truth: Asha — "Truth." The universe as it knows itself to be, that which cannot be sensed except directly by an Enlightened mind — is called the First Incarnation of Truth and, sadly, is almost non-existent in the modern world. Where it flows, where it sings, there is clarity and magic.

Forces: Atash —"Fire." Truth's firstborn child, the Second Incarnation of Asha, the highest manifestation of Truth in this world, closest to the original state of the Tellurian, is the Forces Sphere. It *is* the reflection of the fire of Truth, the Sphere that grants the most direct access to the power of Truth and, thus, the Sphere all Weavers must strive to understand first.

Matter: Getig — "Material." Just as magic is woven into objects and djinn can be trapped in vessels, Truth itself can be trapped in solid form. When force is bound by form, mired in mere physicality, it loses some of its potency, but remains powerful by virtue of its sheer substance if not its dynamism. A sword may be nothing more than a piece of metal, but, properly wielded, it is just as effective as the Devouring Gullet of Flame. The Third Incarnation of Truth is also called the Sphere of Matter. When we weave magic into physical objects, we are calling on the Truth that inhabits the cold form of matter.

Spirit: Menog — "Spirit." The Secret Incarnation of Truth, also called Invisible Truth, the Truth behind truth or Truth's underpinnings is the Sphere of Spirit.

It represents the world of Spirits that perform their duties in order to maintain the Truth of the world. Wind, for example, doesn't blow without good reason; it blows because the Spirits of wind and air will it to do so, therefore behind the Truth of the wind is the will of Spirits. Spirit is sometimes explained among the Taftâni as the Why Sphere because it explains why Truth wears the forms it does.

Prime: Bundahishen — "Potential" or "Creation." Not everything that could be True is yet. That which is, as yet, neither Truth nor Truth's opposite is Potential Truth or (as the Traditions would have it) Quintessence. Controlling Potential Truth, and therefore that which becomes Truth, requires use of what Traditionalists call the Prime Sphere.

Time: Zurvan — "Time." All things lead to truth in the sweet fullness of time. The Sphere that serves Truth most directly is the one that lets Truth unfold as it will. We refer to time as the Servitor of Truth because it supports and facilitates the unfolding of *asha*, and it will eventually bring the cycle back full circle to acknowledgement of the Tellurian's fiery Truth.

Correspondence: Ribash — "Puzzle" or "Obstacle." As Truth has its servitor in the Time Sphere, so too it has its Obstacles to expeditious unfolding. The desert dwelling Taftâni (which is to say, most of us) think of distance as the greatest Obstacle of Truth, preventing realization of Truth from dawning all at once. By the same token, it prevents Truth from being controlled all at once as well. Some of our older viziers harbor a suspicion that Truth uses space simply to slow down processes that would otherwise run their course too quickly. Understanding space and distance as a metaphor for the obstacles to Truth, allows us to compose alternative metaphors that make space meaningless. The knowledge of the Truth of Space and Distance — study of the secret shortcuts of Truth — comes from studying the Sphere of Correspondences.

Entropy: Wizarishen — "Separation." According to Taftâni lore, Asha and druj are currently locked in conflict, and the struggle between the two is the cause for the existence of the Tellurian. One element this battle shares with every extant thing is that it too has a beginning and an end. Nothing rational or sensible could exist before Asha and druj joined in combat, and once Truth has been universally acknowledged in one scorching moment of realization, it will disengage from the conflict, and everything that was once made possible by the clash will pass away.

Between the cataclysmic engagement and the separation of these two principles, this titanic battle must flow through a certain preordained course, a pattern of movements. This pattern is typically not transparent to those caught in its whiplash flow, but some are capable of feeling the tug and current of qismat (fate or destiny) and navigating through them to their best advantage. The kahin, those Taftâni who attend to the unfolding tides of qismat —which they also call the Flow of Truth — are studying what more mainstream mages refer to as the Sphere of Entropy.

Life: Gumezishen — "Mixture." The Weavers hold that there is a nexus between all extremes where opposites touch and come into direct conflict. The conjunction of Truth and not-Truth results in living creatures that are caught in the ebb and flow of Truth and not-Truth, which is to say that Truth and not-Truth meet at conflict-ridden points called living beings. Those creatures are larger, stronger and healthier that have a greater native affinity for, or balance toward, Truth, while creatures that have a weak connection to Truth, or tend toward not-Truth, are smaller, weaker, more flawed and less healthy. Understanding of Truth allows a Taftâni to increase or decrease the degree to which a being resonates with Truth, allowing him to alter living creatures in various ways.

Mind: Hamestagan — Literally "the place that is neither heaven (i.e., Asha) nor hell (Druj)." Pure Truth is impossible to perceive because most entities don't have the sense organs to understand it. Only the mind purified by thought-fire can perceive Asha. Taftâni consider the Mind Sphere the study and manipulation of that which is neither Asha (Truth) nor druj (falsehood). Belief, thought and understanding are all weak substitutes and pale imitations of Truth, but they aren't malicious like lies or willful misrepresentations of Asha. Less conscious thought tends to allow for more immediate perceptions of Asha. All forms of unenlightened thought are simply ways of denying Asha, or tools for engineering creative denials of Truth, because mental arguments and conscious thought are just ways of rendering Asha less obvious. Minds that have a clearer direct perception of Truth (and, by extension, that which is not Truth) can manipulate minds with looser grips on Truth, making them function more or less efficiently, substituting new non-Truths for the original ones and thereby changing thoughts, opinions, behaviors, and even personalities.

Weaving

Taftâni perform a great deal of their magic through objects of art they have crafted themselves. Whether the medium is tapestry, metal, glass or language — as in the case of the Sha'ir's poetry — artistry, ego and the revela-

tion of Truth are the essence of Taftâni magic. Art, as practiced by the Weavers, is the physical (or verbal) embodiment of a Taftâni wizard's individuality and ability to bring Truth to bear on the physical world. Even technically skillful art that is not produced by a Truth-sensing mind is largely inert, while even simple creations of the Enlightened mind have the capacity to come alive by channeling or revealing Truth. (The Taftâni are not unlike the Sons of Ether in this way, only their magic flows through works of art rather than science.)

There is only one guideline with regard to which arts a Weaver practices: it must be utilitarian, something the Taftâni might need to practice in the course of his day to day existence. Glassblowing, pottery, metalsmithing and, obviously, weaving are common skills among the Taftâni. Even a young Taftâni will have training in two or three of the more common crafts, while an older mage is likely to have mastered a dozen crafts including some of the less common ones (see sidebar below for examples). Those arts which have no daily utility outside of amusement, like acting or painting, are considered decadent and warned against. Truth is not always pretty; Taftâni are not interested in creating beauty, they are interested in revealing Truth, and therein lies the key to Taftâni magic.

While it does not create a physical item, poetry is considered the most exalted of the art forms because language, by its very nature, is magical in that it—unlike other tools—is a medium for representing reality itself just as reality is a medium for representing Truth.

Even an individual without access to magic is capable of shaping reality in others' minds, thereby determining how those others perceive reality. If Faruq says to Ali "Your father is dead," then Ali's understanding of the world changes without actually having been present for the death of his father. So, when language is crafted into poetry by a Taftâni, whose Enlightened insight and clear thought allow him to reveal Truth through rhythm, meter and skillfully chosen words, he is able to represent not just reality, but Truth itself. By speaking the poetry of Truth, the Taftâni can make mere reality conform to his words.

The Taftâni focus on craft is the key that prevents the Weavers from going mad and becoming Marauders. Their strong inclination toward wild and aggressive magic use is indicative of the strong Taftâni bias toward the cosmological principle called the Wyld. Balancing that inclination towards wild dynamism is the discipline required of any craftsperson to create a work of art. That intense focus and self-control is the contribution of the Weaver, the cosmic manifestation of order. While an outside observer may perceive the Taftâni mage as a wild man wielding magic indiscriminately, most of that appearance grows out of the Weavers' notorious sense of theatrics, and the opposite is actually true. Becoming one of the Taftâni requires highly developed skills and knowledge.

Just as their ties to the Weaver prevent the Taftâni from plunging into unmitigated Dynamism, the Wyld prevents them from falling too far into the realm of Stasis. The Taftâni create art, which is Truth tempered by ego; without their strong emphasis on freedom and individuality, the Taftâni's urge toward creation would result in the kind of mass-production that is the hallmark of technology rather than art. The wildness of the Weavers prevents that because their egos are too strong to allow even two of their works of art to resemble one another too strongly, so mass production is safely out of the picture. Every Weaver and every Weaver objet d'art must be unique and special as that clichéd snowflake. What the Taftâni do, then, is channel Truth through their egos through the medium of their crafts. Without a strong ego, Enlightenment backed by confidence, Taftâni cannot do magic.

Bottle of Djinn

Among the more powerful abilities possessed by the Taftâni is the power to imprison and command djinn. Like most Spirit magic, the mage gains the djinni's power without the danger of Paradox. Since the average djinn is a little more intelligent and powerful

Crafts

Crafts practiced by the Taftâni include, but are not limited to: glassblowing, carpet and tapestry weaving, knotworking, pottery, calligraphy, poetry, singing, music, storytelling, metalsmithing, alchemy, jewelry making, sculpture, musical instrument crafting, woodworking, carpentry, gemcutting (rare) and dance (though the last is generally considered a woman's art).

Among the arts that Taftâni avoid are acting, painting, taxidermy and any other diversion that does not contribute to the quality of quotidian life.

The more philosophical, theoretical or intellectual arts, including architecture, astrology, astronomy, mathematics, metaphysics and philosophy—while considered worthy pursuits—are seen as the purview of scientists and philosophers as they don't create anything useful to the common man. They also tend to be the specialties of the Ahl-i-Batin who don't care to share their knowledge.



than the typical spirit a mage is likely to interact with, magi who deal with djinn have a significant advantage over those who do not. This is an advantage the Weavers like to keep to themselves.

The techniques for the creation of a proper vessel fit to contain a djinni are closely guarded by the Taftâni and not shared until relatively late in the student's education. From the Taftâni's perspective, they are the only Tradition capable of handling the shrewd Spirits and therefore the only Tradition worthy of the djinn's servitude. The art of djinn entrapment is a secret the Taftâni go far to protect, including hunting down and killing those mages who are a little too free with the secrets of the art.

There are several things a Taftâni takes into consideration when creating a djinn bottle:

First, while the vessel may be of any fireproof material, it must be watertight. When a Weaver creates a vessel for holding a djinni, he uses Matter magic to toughen the substance considerably, so while a thick bronze flask may appear stronger than a crystal bottle, it's not — the crystal is treated and prepared so that it'll survive the rigors of a spirit of fire.

Djinn cannot physically damage a properly prepared vessel, but if the container is somehow pierced and the seal on the container is broken, the djinni is freed. Disrupting a djinn vessel isn't easy, though. It takes a great deal of trauma to damage a container so severely that its captive is released. In game terms, a typical djinn vessel can take around 20 health levels of damage before the djinni is set free, and the djinni is likely to make a quick exit back to the Invisible World before her rescuers ask for some boon.

Second, the vessel must be appropriately sized for the power level of the djinn it was constructed to hold. Servitor djinn, the lowest caste, can be bound into a space the size of a camel's tooth; these djinn may be found imprisoned in small jars, rings or other items of jewelry. Outside of the servitors, most djinn below the level of caliph can be bound in a vessel the size of a man's fist, including glass bottles, metal oil lamps, flasks and cucurbites. Caliphs, on the other hand, require a minimum of one cubic meter — roughly the volume of space taken up by a camel. Amirs and Sultans have only been captured in this fashion a handful of times throughout the course of history, and require yet more space. Capturing a djinn Sultan, for instance, requires a watertight, fire-proof 3,000 cubic meter vault with enormous and incredibly complex seals etched onto the inside of the chamber and on the outside of the vault's door.

The seal is the final element necessary in creating a djinn bottle, and it must be appropriate to the djinn to be contained. Ideally, the djinni's true name should be inscribed on the seal, both as extra security, and to let any naive mage who stumbles on the bottle know who is contained within. True names are necessary if the mage is intent on making frequent or long-term use of the djinn as a familiar or slave. For simple containment, however, true names aren't generally necessary unless the djinni is of the rank of caliph or above. A servitor can be held in check with a simple Seal of Solomon etched on the outside of its vessel. On the other hand, the highly complex geometric design required to seal a vessel containing a Caliph, for example, requires not just magical proficiency, but four or more dots in an appropriate artistic Ability and the research necessary to ascertain its true name.

Taftâni Resonance

Resonance plays a large part in the magical life of the Taftâni. Many (if not all) Weavers feel that strong Resonance is the privilege and badge of office of those who serve Truth, and hiding it in any way is a form of deception.

Weavers, with their love of big, spectacular magical Effects pick up Resonance easily, and more often than not, they take pride in that fact. Since they don't dampen or hide their Resonance, it's frequently a simple matter to track a Taftâni mage from the scene of his most recent magical working — another advantage the Technocracy has over the Weavers. Those in the more prevalent Zaotar sect almost always have Dynamic Resonance because of their intense veneration of fire. Kahin, on the other hand, are somewhat more likely to have Primordial Resonance. Taftâni, wild as they are, almost never have Static Resonance, though it's not entirely impossible that a Weaver who was intensely focused on his craft might gain a point or two of a Resonance like Focused, Intense or Single-minded.

Due to the highly vulgar nature of most Taftâni magic, their Effects are typically rich with Resonance, so a Zaotar with explosive Resonance will want to keep herself far away from airplanes, artillery bunkers and gas stations any time she's inclined to use Forces magic. Likewise, a Kahin with hypnotic Resonance will find himself enchanting others with disturbing ease.

Any Taftâni is likely to have one of the following flavors of Resonance: Alarming, Blunt, Catalytic, Clarifying, Confrontational, Disillusioning, Illuminating or Relentless.

The Solomonic Code

Contrary to what some mages (and even some few djinn) claim, Suleiman did not create a powerful enchantment that caused all djinn to behave according to the dictates of human mages. On the contrary, he merely noted certain tendencies in the behavior of djinn and systematically tested certain assumptions he made about their nature and their role in the universe.

The precise formulae involved in djinn-binding antedate intelligent human life. They are simply ancient limits placed by the fabricators of the universe on the house of spirits that we call djinn.

The complete list of Suleiman's codified observations is extensive. Just as with Biblical scriptures, which points are definitely canon and which are not (or should not be), remain open to debate. While many of the key points of Solomonic Code ("Djinn cannot serve more than a single consciousness at one time.") make it into every translation of such lore, for every such canonical point, there are two or three less observed points ("A mortal who sires a child upon a djinni may be taken immediately and forcibly into the Invisible World so that he may be examined for good health by the other djinn of her court.") that frequently get ignored or left out of collections of Solomonic Code.

Authoritative and complete copies of the Solomonic Code, therefore, are highly regarded and carefully guarded under the most complex and dangerous wards known to the mage. Taftâni invariably booby trap their copies of the Solomonic Code to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands, which, in its strictest definition means anyone else, and at its most lenient means anyone who is not a member of the Taftâni.

Only four laws are known to have made it into every version of the Solomonic Code:

Djinn cannot directly harm the individual whose service they are in.

Djinn are under no obligation to protect a man from himself.

Djinn cannot handle or in any way affect the vessel of another djinni, nor can a djinni speak directly of a djinni who has been imprisoned or enslaved.

When called by its full and correct name, no djinni may refuse to attend its master.

Burn Baby, Burn

There is no mistaking an experienced Taftâni mage from the Zaotar sect. Even if they're not using Vulgar Forces magic at the moment, they still charge the air around them with the power they exude. When the mage enters the room, every metal surface crackles with static electricity, the room may warm a couple of degrees, those around them have the disturbing experience of feeling the hairs on their arms and the backs of their necks stand on end, and people may find themselves being a little more abrupt, honest or confrontational than usual.

As for the Zaotar themselves, they frequently have a slightly singed look about them (though this may just as easily be from Paradox burn as Resonance), they may seem hyperactive or manic, their hair may stand perpetually on end if they use a lot of lightning Effects, and they frequently have a faint smell of smoke or ozone about them.

The Zaotar are likely to have any of the following kinds of Resonance: Abrasive, Angry, Blatant, Destructive, Explosive, Fiery, Fulminating, Fuming, Hot, Hyper, Incendiary, Martial, Radiant, Searing, Stormy.

Strange Gristiat

The Kahin aren't quite as explosive (literally or figuratively) as their more aggressive brethren, but they're no less intimidating for that. Staring into the void of fate has a clear and unmistakable effect on the soothsayers and curse layers of the Taftâni — as Nietzsche said, "Know that when you stare into the void, the void stares also into you" — and the eerie aura of odd little circumstances that follow the Kahin can become more than a little unnerving in themselves.

Those around the Kahin may notice a number of odd sensations, including a disturbing sensation of being watched, chills or a state of intense tranquility. Sometimes just proximity to a Kahin can cause strange visions or dreams in those not normally so sensitive, and individuals may find that they can't get the mage out of their thoughts. Worse, those a Kahin is angry at may have nightmares for a few nights until the mage's temper settles.

For whatever reason, many Kahin adopt strange or eccentric mannerisms: smoking a hookah while soothsaying, for example, or wearing sunglasses 24 hours a day. Kahin frequently speak in rhymed.

sion deletes certain key passages (designated by the mage beforehand), or even substitutes misinformation for those passages.

The mage may need to trigger the Effect or it may trigger automatically when anyone other than the mage opens the book (or takes the scroll from its tube, or pulls the file up on a screen, as the case may be).

System: Matter magic bleeds and warps the ink out of its place on the page, thereby rendering text completely unreadable. In conjunction with Mind magic, the text changes in ways predetermined by the mage, typically deleting key phrases or paragraphs and making it very likely that the thief will get himself hurt or killed through his own actions. Adding the Entropy Effect lets the mage "hang" the spell on Fate, so that it takes effect even if the mage isn't around when the book is opened by another. Even without the use of Time magic, the spell waits, because it is essentially keyed to automatically occur at a given nexus of Fate.

Note: Many less subtle Taftâni are perfectly content with a simple booby trap Rote (••(or more) Forces, •• Prime, ••• Entropy) that causes the book to catch fire or explode when touched by unauthorized hands. Only those Weavers who want a thief to meet his doom through poetic justice go to the lengths to use Corrupt Text.

MET: Initiate (Basic) *Matter*, Initiate (Basic) *Mind*, sometimes Disciple (Intermediate) *Entropy*. You cause a piece of text to become illegible when you finish casting the rote. Typically you must be able to see/sense it, but most mages forge an arcane connection with their magical writings, which is also sufficient. Aside from the Arete casting challenge, no challenge is necessary, but you may only perform this rote on something that you have written yourself or to which you have an arcane connection. With the *Entropy* version, you may cause the Effect to occur even if you are not currently aware of the theft of the lore in question. This can wait for up to a day with the basic casting.

By using *Forces* and *Prime*, you can cause a book to explode into flames when opened by unauthorized hands; the subject touching the book takes one automatic level of aggravated damage. However, since this is contingent upon Fate, it only afflicts someone who tries to steal your knowledge from your books — if you give permission, or if you are just flinging books at someone, the spell has no effect.

Grades of Success: Each grade of effect allows you to extend the duration of the waiting *Entropy* version by one grade.

Delay Paradox (•••Prime, ••• Spirit, ••• Time)

Taftâni magi who need to accomplish a vulgar feat before being hit with an anticipated Paradox backlash may perform this rote before their great work and ease the blow somewhat, spreading the effect over a number of days and possibly preventing the mage from dying in the process. The first point of Paradox will hit the morning of the day following the vulgar feat, with an additional point of Paradox accruing every [number of successes] morning thereafter until the full backlash has hit. The point of this Rote is that, if the Weaver has sufficient self-control to avoid magic for a week or two, large backlashes can be mitigated somewhat by the natural dissipation of Paradox. This rote is even more effective for Taftâni who keep familiars with the ability to "eat" Paradox.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Prime*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Spirit*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Time*. You cause the forces of Paradox to bend around you and hover in wait. Instead of suffering an instant backlash from your next accumulation of Paradox, the Paradox forces hang and wait; the Paradox bleeds off at a rate of one point per day thereafter. However, if you accrue any more Paradox during this time, it can still backlash and cause all of the hanging Paradox to fire. Also note that if you wish to hang multiple instances of Paradox, you must cast and keep "up" a separate iteration of this rote for each instance of Paradox gained. The base version lasts for a day — all of the Paradox waits, one point bleeds off at the next sunrise, and then the rest comes crashing down the day after. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the duration by one grade.

Infidel's Laughter (•• Forces, •• Spirit)

The Taftâni named this rote because it rendered them immune to the attacks of the overzealous Muslims they had offended. Knives bounce off, bullets ricochet, even the force of explosions is reflected away from the Weaver while this simple rote is in Effect.

System: The Taftâni reweaves his own aura in such a way that the kinetic energy of any physical attack is instantly reversed the moment it gets within inches of the mage. In certain circumstances (i.e., four or more successes on an Arete roll) bullets may even retrace their exact path, which typically results in the bullet striking the shooter's elbow or forearm (due to recoil). Obviously, in regions where the Technocratic paradigm is dominant, this Rote is highly vulgar. Luckily for the Taftâni, that does not currently include the Khyber Pass.



MET: Initiate (Basic) *Forces*, Initiate (Basic) *Spirit*. You alter your aura so that it deflects incoming attacks. You gain one additional health level that refreshes every turn at the beginning of the turn. This effect has a base duration of one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success grants one additional regenerating health level of protection, or extends the duration by one grade, or allows you to affect one other subject, or allows you to reverse an attack if you win the challenge against the attacker (causing the attacker to strike himself).

Sha'ir's Sentence
(••• Entropy, •• Life, •• Mind)

The Taftâni poet composes a poem about his target that evokes some weakness (or perceived weakness) in the target, speaks insightfully and cuttingly of that weakness and concludes by labeling the target with a nickname that cleverly captures the essence of the weakness. By speaking the poem to the target in the company of his friends or family, the mage brands the target with that nickname. Thereafter, the nickname will stick and become increasingly true.

For example, if the victim has a slightly large nose and the mage brands the target with the name "Camel Face," the name will stick. Thereafter, the target's associates will be inclined to call him Camel Face, behind his back if nothing else. With time, the target's mind and body will accept the Sentence and begin conforming as much as possible (without being Vulgar) to the nickname; in this case, the target will come to resemble a camel as much as a person can.

The Sentence generally manifests in the target's Attributes, though it could impact Abilities if that's more appropriate. The nickname "Camel Face" would, over the span of around two years, lower the target's Appearance by 2, whereas the nickname "Stumblefoot" would have a similar effect on Dexterity.

This rote can also be used to reward one's friends. By using the *Sha'ir*'s Sentence to append Musa's name with the epithet "the Clever," the Weaver can incorporate a previously unremarkable cleverness into Musa's nature by increasing Musa's Mental Attributes (which ones determined by the ST) by two dots over the course of two years.

A target can only have one nickname at any given time. If he gets a new one, the old one drops into disuse and loses its effect.

System: Entropic magic embeds the nickname into the target's pattern. Mind magic reinforces the curse (or blessing) in the target's consciousness, thereby

creating something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Life magic renders the target's body somewhat malleable, allowing the Entropy and Mind Effects to have effect over the body.

The composition of the poem is the actual magical working, so it is very easy to make this rote an extended effect. When the Weaver is ready to put the spell into effect, he meets his target in a public place — in the presence of others who know the target — and recites the poem from memory. Possession of the Expression and/or Performance Abilities can add successes or lower the casting difficulty at the Storyteller's discretion.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Entropy*, Initiate (Basic) *Life*, Initiate (Basic) *Mind*. You must build a short poem or phrase about your subject and speak it aloud. This should give the suject some sort of single, easily-recognizable moniker: "the Strong," "the Just," "the Incompetent," or whatever. You make a Social Challenge if the target is unwilling; if you succeed, you may afflict the target with one bonus or negative Trait associated with your phrase. The modifier typically lasts for a day. Extended use of this rite can justify the increase (or decrease!) of Traits in a permanent fashion, subject to the normal limits. *Grades of Success*: With one extra grade you can make the modifier two Traits. Or, you can use grades of success to extend the duration.

Self Possession (•••• Mind)

Taftâni place a great deal of importance in autonomy and clear thought. More than any other Tradition, Weavers *despise* having their self-control compromised in any way. Self Possession prevents or counters such invasions. As if deliberately getting a song stuck in her head, the mage repeats in her head a mantra, a poem or a tune that symbolizes her to herself. In time, this thought process becomes habitual and spins off into the back of the caster's mind where it repeats endlessly. This Rote essentially splits off a small portion of the caster's consciousness and charges it to monitor the rest. Should the mage come under the control of another creature, this Effect allows the mage to possess the portion of the entity that is in his mind, thereby taking back control of his actions even while the consciousness of another entity is "in control" of his main psyche.

System: The compartmentalized consciousness splits off from the mage's core psyche when the Rote is cast and thenceforth remains present, quiescent and transparent (requiring 10+ successes with Mind magic to detect).

So long as Self Possession is in effect, the mage has a number of extra "virtual" Willpower points (equal to the number of successes on her Arete roll) to prevent mind-tampering or -controlling effects. Even if the invader succeeds, he is at -3 on all attempts to control the mage.

If the mage is somehow "mind-controlled" by another entity (through vampiric Presence or Dominate, Mind magic, Spirit or demonic possession), the mage is allowed an Arete roll to counter-possess the portion of the invader's mind controlling the mage (as per the Possession Rote on page 178 of **Mage: The Ascension**). If successful, the mage is free to do what she will with the invader, including hold him prisoner in her psyche or boot him out of her mind.

MET: Adept (Intermediate) *Mind*. You compartmentalize your mind and place a small portion of your consciousness in a tiny, hidden fragment. You gain a three-Trait bonus on defense against invading mental attacks (only). If you do fall victim to someone else's possession effect, you can make a new challenge on your next turn to assert your consciousness back over the interloper's. The portion of the invader's psyche remains trapped in your consciousness, though — so, a mage might try to control you but find his effect nullified, while if a vampire moved his consciousness into your body, he'd suddenly find himself unable to leave and no longer in control. This effect lasts for an hour/ scene. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success adds one grade to duration.

Spinning Thread (••• Forces or Matter, •• Prime •• Spirit)

Even weavers cannot weave without thread. This rote allows the Taftâni to gather, in a physical sense, the more esoteric she needs for her magic. When a magical formula calls for "the shriek of a thrice cursed ifrit," this rote allows the mage to distill the essence of that phenomenon into a form she can work with: Tass.

System: The opposite of fireball, in a way: instead of embodying the ideal of a fireball with Prime and Forces, this is taking the natural phenomenon and using its Quint/Resonance/Tass.

MET: Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces* or *Matter*, Initiate (Basic) *Prime*, Initiate (Basic) *Spirit*. You absorb the Quintessence from a flame or material object and distill it into Tass. Generally, you take any volume of force or matter that you could yourself conjure and you sublimate its Quintessential threads into a tiny idealization that holds power. For instance, you might absorb the Quintessence out of a flame, left only with a tiny bit of smoke that you capture in a bottle. That smoke would be Tass, holding one Trait of Quintessence that you could use once you opened the bottle. The item also has Resonance appropriate to its original

form. This can sublimate up to a cubic foot of volume, although you can only affect an object that isn't magically protected or in someone else's possession. This rote is only designed to function on pure elements or esoteric ingredients; you can't use it to distill technological items, for instance. *Grades of Success:* You can affect larger or more complex items with enough successes. Each grade of success becomes a multiplier to the volume (two cubic feet with one success, then three with two successes and so on).

Weavers' Retribution
(•••• Spirit, ••• Correspondence, ••• Forces, •• Mind, •• Prime)

Only a handful of Taftâni know this Rote at any given time, and it is considered nothing less than a suicide strike, though its actual effectiveness has more to do with the location of the Taftâni at the time he triggers the Effect than any other factor. If the mage has a storehouse of djinn vessels, or if he's near a vault or collection of such vessels, this is a devastating strike; otherwise it has very little effect whatsoever.

The Weaver extends his senses out in a several kilometer radius to discover the whereabouts of all local djinn vessels, which he then unseals, simultaneously unleashing all the djinn in that area.

Taftâni history has only one tale of the Effect ever being used. An old and, some say, crazed Taftâni refused to give in when encroaching then-Order of Reason agents closed in on the Middle East during the Renaissance. The Crusades may have failed, but the economic repercussions of developing Europe created a seed that blossomed into dominance centuries later; by the time the Taftâni started to wane, it was too late to turn back the clock. In order to wreck an entire stronghold of the Order, the Taftâni in question unleashed every djinni within twelve miles — and, during the 1600s, that was still a formidable force. The smoking ruins of the entire *town* became testament to the force of a small army of angry efrit.

System: Correspondence, Mind and Spirit magic allow the Taftâni to search a large area around her for djinn vessels, which she then uses Forces and Prime to unseal, freeing the djinn within. An intelligent Weaver will make further use of Mind magic to at least nudge the djinn toward the outcome she hopes to bring about.

Even with Mind magic, the mage has no assurance that the djinn will intervene in any way on her behalf, and it's entirely possible that the djinn may see the mage as the greatest danger present and kill her, but the chaos that a mass release of djinn creates is certain to change the situation radically.

MET: Adept (Intermediate) *Spirit*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Correspondence*, Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces*, Initiate (Basic) *Mind*, Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You release every trapped djinn from a vessel within your *Correspondence* range (typically, fifteen paces plus three paces per Arete Trait). These djinn act as they will, under no compunctions to aid or hinder you, though they likely revel in their freedom. Some may simply flee to the Umbra while others wreak havoc on the scenery. In the modern age, there's no guarantee of a trapped djinn anywhere in range, of course, so it helps to improve the range. Still, this Effect is most devastating when used in a locale where the Taftâni knows that trapped djinn reside — such as his sanctum. *Grades of Success:* Each grade adds a multiplier to the range (one grade doubles the range; two grades triples it, and so on).

Wonders



As "weavers of wondrous things," the Taftâni hoard all manner of knick-knacks, relics and treasures. Many have only sentimental value, but the Taftâni seem to have more than their fare share of wonders. In some part this stems from their stewardship; with an eye toward guarding dangerous containers, the Taftâni often know the locales of many powerful devices. Combine this with the Taftâni enthusiasm for building their own artifacts — whether by weaving their own flying rugs, manufacturing magical bottles or crafting carefully made animate ropes — and the Taftâni probably have enough artifacts to keep a group three times their population awash in wonders.

Djinn

We have spent our lives between the killing sun and the hot sand dealing with djinn. No one knows their ways, their tricks, their deadly wiles like we do. You must not doubt that. Believe me, then, when I tell you that there is no more dishonorable, deceptive and unruly creature than a djinni. A djinni will lie to you, trick you, if possible, into any situation that might end in your demise, and it will happily watch your death throes while laughing at its own cleverness. We Taftâni have tale after tale illustrating precisely that behavior. If you have not lived with the djinn, if you have not suffered their whims, you do not know. Stop your prattling and I'll tell you about the djinn.

Djinn are the vermin of the wastes, the jackals of the sand and, increasingly, a menace to everyone, within Arabia as well as outside of it. They lie in wait for the unwary in the dunes, in the oases, and, now, in the great cities of the world, and only the Taftâni — may your fortunes soon brighten — stand between the djinn and humanity.

Of course you have your doubts. "Are there no good djinn?" you ask. You are young and your optimism, your idealism, your naiveté have yet to be wrenched away from you.

Let me answer your question. No, there are no good djinn. Their bitterness makes them vicious from the oldest sultan among them to you youngest servitor. The djinn are perpetually angry at the human race. They came first, and for millennia they were certain that they were destined to be the pinnacle of creation, the masters of Spirit-kind and the inheritors of the visible world. Mortals, they assumed, would be their servants. That we turned the tables on them stands to this day to be the greatest insult the djinn courts have ever had to deal with.

There are more than a few lessons to be learned from dealing with djinn.

First, don't trust them. Few other creatures — except perhaps vampires — combine arrogance, malevolence and guile in such dangerous proportions. There is nothing a djinni will not do to trick, trap, mislead or ruin you. While a well-trained servitor can generally be counted upon to perform basic tasks without turning on you, the other castes are all quite certain that they're smarter than you are.

For that reason, any djinn that insists on remaining in the physical world should be — for the safety of the human race, must be — tracked down, imprisoned and forced to serve his betters. This should be done at least as much to teach him a lesson as to get the benefit of his labor.

This is the most important role played by the Taftâni, and if we disappear from the face of the world, the ignorant and noxious Technocracy will have its pale and swinish hands more than full.

Simoon

Willpower 5, **Rage** 9, **Gnosis** 1, **Power** 120



Charms: Appear, Armor, Blast, Create Fire, Create Wind, Disable, Materialize, Mirage, Mislead, Sand Storm, Sand Swallow, Shapeshift, Smoke (Sand) Screen, Track

Materialized Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 10, Stamina 10, Mental/Social equal to Gnosis.

Abilities: Brawl 10, Dodge 10, Etiquette 1, Expression (Howling/Screeching) 2, Intimidation 8

Materialized Health Levels: 50

Background: Simoon, the spirit of the devastating, hot, sand-laden wind that howls across the Arabian and Saharan deserts, is one of the most dangerous spirits Arabian Taftâni summon. Brutal, mindless and intensely destructive, Simoon is the attack beast of those Weavers living in the Rub al-Khali. They revere its ferocity and respect the power it has over their lives. Aside from the more powerful djinn, Simoon is one of the Taftâni's best resources in their struggle against Technocratic hegemony.

Image: Simoon appears as an immense, roiling sandstorm and has no form that could be called even vaguely humanoid.



With the Taftâni so rare in the modern age, nearly every one is a notable personage. After all, in a Craft of perhaps a dozen members (two dozen at best), every individual is a standout. This isn't to say, though, that the Taftâni don't pay heed to the *unusual* qualities of some of their membership. Indeed, a given Taftâni can garner a special nickname due to some quality: A particularly cunning wizard might garner a moniker recognizing his deeds or sneakiness, while a skillful craftsman could be noted for her choice of patterns in rug designs — say, the use of mythical beasts. And, of course, the Taftâni still remember the founders of their Craft and the magicians who pioneered their legacy.

HAZAN I-SABBAH

Perhaps the most charismatic and persuasive orator in Taftâni history is the great and highly revered Hazan I-Sabbah, the man who enumerated the conventions of Persian craft-based magic and gave the djinn-commanding viziers of the Middle East the name "Taftâni" or Weavers.

I-Sabbah himself was very much a weaver in the literal sense in that creating rugs was both his original trade and his primary means of performing magic. I-Sabbah's rugs were among the most sought after wonders of the Persian Empire. Some of them had the true names of a djinni woven into them as a way of binding that spirit to the item, others had the names of elementals woven into them, allowing for rugs that could, among other things, trap and burn an opponent, allow movement through solid earth, skim across the surface of the ocean at miraculous speeds and, of course, fly.



I-Sabbah was a great advocate of Taftâni cooperation. In pursuit of that grand goal, I-Sabbah set up the tradition of the *haram*, or sanctuary, where the Taftâni could gather peacefully to brag, discuss matters of interest to the viziers and show off their apprentices. In a moving speech that is quoted by Taftâni even today, I-Sabbah swore that if the Weavers could unite and work together in concert, the threads of the Tapestry itself would obey their will and there would be nothing they could not do.

Obviously, I-Sabbah failed to achieve that vast degree of success, but he was able to at least minimize, for a time, the number of Taftâni deaths caused by outright magical dueling.

For many years, in what is now seen as the Taftâni's golden age, the viziers were able to work together in handfuls as opposed to individuals or pairs. The meeting of minds yielded some spectacular results that are to this day the stuff of Taftâni legend.

It was only a matter of decades, however, before the arrogance and ego that control the Taftâni resumed its slow devouring of the Craft from the inside out.

By the end of his several hundred-year life, I-Sabbah was more than a little disillusioned. He still spoke occasionally with various Taftâni masters toward the end of his life, trying to be the voice of reason, but his words never seemed to make it to their ears. I-Sabbah took three apprentices over the course of his life, and while they worked together frequently, other Taftâni avoided them, and the ideal of cooperation that they espoused.

In the end, Hazan I-Sabbah had given his people three things that have lasted into the present: a brief golden age of something approximating cooperation, the tradition of the *haram*, and, for what it's worth, a group identity.

HAJI AYUB AFRIDI

Among the most notorious and active Taftâni in the world today, Haji Ayub Afridi is one of the most powerful warlords in the barbaric outlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan, a multi-millionaire drug smuggler



and a textbook example of the aggressive Zaotar faction of the Taftâni.

Afridi underwent his mystic training later than most, beginning his apprenticeship at the age of 32. Prior to 1979, he was a diplomatic attaché for the Shah of Iran. After 1979, certain...propensities of his made returning to public life in his now fundamentalist native land inadvisable. At his father's request, he went into hiding with a very old and powerful Zaotar living in the Dasht-e Kavir, the enormous salt desert in western Iran.

It was a difficult transition for both *wali* and apprentice. Afridi and Hazim al-Qartajanni, his Taftâni master fought for most of the first year. If Afridi had had anywhere to go, and if al-Qartajanni had other potential pupils, both would have rather ended the apprenticeship. After the first year, however, Afridi got a taste of what it meant to command Spirits, and he resolved to do whatever Hazim required of him to master the art of magic.

After seven years of training, the wily al-Qartajanni — who was just under eight hundred years old — had taught Afridi everything he knew. He gave Afridi all but two of his djinn, and went to Semnan, a city one hundred miles east of Tehran, and crossed the chinvat, opening the eyes of thousands of Sleepers even as his final enormous magic display turned all the mosques in the city to sand.

Taking everything he and his several djinn servitors could carry, Afridi left al-Qartajanni's luxurious fortress in the Dasht-e Kavir and went to Afghanistan, where his enormous control of spirits rapidly catapulted him to power.

For nearly two decades, Afridi has made war on those he sees as dregvanti. To his way of thinking, the only thing keeping him from becoming one of the most powerful mages on the planet is the Technocracy. While he realizes that he is not coming from a position of power, Afridi does what he can to minimize Technocratic influence across the globe, but especially in Russia and, to a much lesser extent, in the United States.

Afridi has the deep appreciation of Forces magic expected of a Zaotar, but Spirit is both his favored Sphere and his most powerful. Unlike most Taftâni, Afridi occasionally ventures into the Invisible World. He has been to the City of Brass innumerable times seeking out particular spirits whose services he required.

After almost twenty years of manipulation and power games, Afridi controls almost all of the opium and hashish traffic in Afghanistan. Given that both poppies and marijuana grow well there and that Afghanis propagate both plentifully across large portions of the country, those two crops are easily the primary source of income for the third poorest country in the world. This makes Afridi exceptionally wealthy. While Afridi himself would never touch the drugs he distributes (lest he endanger his atar or thought-fire) and haurvatat ("integrity,"), he happily sells opium and hashish to the Russians and to cartels taking the drugs to other Tech-friendly countries. His hope is to undermine the Technocracy indirectly by addicting and weakening the residents of those countries where the Technocracy is most firmly ensconced, and in his mind that means Russia and the United States. While that's obviously a tall order, Afridi does what he can to get as many Russians and Americans hooked on the goods he purveys, and he's not above using Mind magic to get the ball rolling. While the Russian army was occupying Afghanistan, Afridi had three out of every four Russian soldiers smoking opium or mainlining heroin, a practice that continues for many of them to this day in dark needle-strewn alleys from Grozny to Moscow. Rightly or wrongly, Afridi takes credit for the defeat of the Russians, largely because he cut off heroin to any soldier whom he thought fought too enthusiastically, sending them into the painful delirium of withdrawal.

Afridi does *not* exemplify the Taftâni tendency toward isolation. Assisting him in his backwater highland empire is a small army of barbaric gunmen, apprentices, consors and djinn. He has two estates, one in Jalalabad (east of Kabul) and one in Landi Kotal, in Pakistan. The house in Landi Kotal is massive and far enough from civilization that he lets his apprentices practice vulgar magic in the open anywhere on the estate. He also keeps

a number of Bygones there, which serve both to feed his ego and to feed *on* would-be trespassers.

The Technocracy has been very effectively wiping out many small Crafts in recent years, and as it has done so Afridi's name has been creeping up to the top of the Technocracy's list of enemies. He is now Reality Deviant #1. To date, the Technocracy has sent no fewer than three assault teams to assassinate Afridi, but all three have disappeared without a trace.

Afridi and company, meanwhile, get away with increasingly gratuitous displays of magic near populated areas, and the Technocracy is furious. Afridi can sense their ire half a world a way, and nothing could please him more.

The Black Shaykh

Not all Taftâni have allowed the Technocracy to corral them in the Empty Quarter of Arabia or similar backwaters. The Taftâni master Faruq bin-Jadis, called the Black Shaykh because of his preference for black over all color, has established not one but two Taftâni sancta in the heart of Manhattan.

Bin-Jadis grew tired of fending off Paradox backlashes every time he brought the world into line with the way he thought it should be. He considered it an unspeakable offense that reality had been so tampered with by the Technocracy that it should attack him every time he left the Empty Quarter. While he was still in Arabia, bin-Jadis conceived and executed a plan that continues to shock and inspire the Weavers of Arabia.

Faruq bin-Jadis had never been content to live in a glorified tent in the desert. He was sufficiently frugal with his Vulgar manipulations that Paradox did not kill him when he left the Empty Quarter, but neither was he content to perform parlor tricks in desert hamlets like a common fakir. Through means both discreet and impulsive, bin-Jadis acquired a number of oil wells just before the "Oil Crisis" of the early seventies. With the revenues provided thereby, he bought a rundown building in the Arabic district of Harlem in New York. The building — a rat- and roach-infested six story walk-up that had been considered spectacular some fifty years previous — was slated to become a casualty of urban renewal until city officials learned that it had been purchased by a rich Arab, at which point the city turned its attentions elsewhere.



Bin-Jadis sent acolytes to board up the windows and strip the building of anything that might reinforce the Technocratic paradigm (electrical wiring, for example). He then flew to New York on the back of a captive *ifrit* (which died from the experience) via the Umbra.

Once inside the boarded up building (and after recovering from the Paradox he accrued en route), bin-Jadis transformed the space into an exceedingly lavish sanctum. One by one, he unsealed the twenty copper bottles of *djinn* he'd prepared in the Empty Quarter. Between his magic and their work, they transformed his new home into a palace that transcended anything in *The Arabian Nights*. Sumptuous brocades covered the walls and the floor was covered with silk pillows. Everything shined with the warm glow of copper, brass and bronze and the air was perfumed with the wafting scents of musk and myrrh.

Within the confines of the building that he calls his palace, bin-Jadis is free to toss around as much magic as his (impressive) mastery of the Spheres will allow with no fear of Paradox.

Not content to be mystically successful, the Black Shaykh expanded his range of influence again, this time into the political arena. His command of the English language, warm personal style and comprehensive knowledge of public planning and real estate law (learned from a spirit he liberated from the law library at Columbia University) have made bin-Jadis a figure to be reckoned with in the political landscape of New York City. His drive and passion (and liberal use of Mind magic) make him a major player and dealmaker in many scenes. Arab-Americans, Palestinian-Americans and even American-born Muslims flock to his banner, adding their support to his cause. It never occurs to them that he's not Islamic in the least, and he's perfectly content to keep his Paganism (and magic use) to himself.

In the early eighties, as his political power was in first blossom, bin-Jadis followed up on his initial real estate triumph by buying the decrepit Oasis Theater, a huge Arabian-themed movie palace dating back to the thirties that was, coincidentally, also about to be demolished. He got it for a song (literally), and with its kitschy Arabian Nights décor (complete with plastic date palms and *faux* clouds projected onto the ceiling), it makes a passable sanctum (at least the secret rooms above the theater do) and a source of income as well (not that he needs it).

With his sancta allowing him free use of magic on two sites in the midst of New York City, bin-Jadis is now working on a plan to create a corridor between the two. He's used his political clout to have the Arabic enclave of Harlem recognized as "Little Arabia." The street signs in that neighborhood are in Arabic as well as English, and the markets bear a strong resemblance to those found in the *souks* of the Middle East. Soon, the street that runs the eight blocks between his "palace" and the Oasis Theater will be indistinguishable from the back streets of Marrakesh and Riyadh, and his first step toward reclaiming the paradigm will be complete.

His work toward affecting the Technocratic paradigm on a large scale has yet to bear fruit. A deal he made with Disney in the late eighties helped to prompt, indirectly, the release of *Aladdin*. While it wasn't all he had hoped it would be, it does keep the Taftâni paradigm in the world consciousness, and he considers it a minor victory for the Taftâni outlook, and it gives him hope that it's not too late for change. Already he has talked the local school board into teaching *Arabian Nights*; soon, he hopes, the old ways will return.

Mono-Traditional Games



Mono-Traditionalgames with the Taftâni can be difficult. For one thing, most Zaotars have egos large enough that any sort of interaction, no less cooperation, is completely impossible. The moment they come within a mile of each other, dogs howl, mirrors crack and flame bolts start to become a large part of the scenery.

That said, many difficult things are notably worthwhile.

All Taftâni have a precedent for cooperation in the *haram*. Given how well many Weavers get along during the *haram*, it's amazing that more Taftâni *don't* get along outside of it. If two Taftâni mages could get into that backslapping, carousing mindset in other circumstances, not only would they be able to stand each other, but they'd probably make boon companions. It's also true that, obstacles to cooperation notwithstanding, a Taftâni probably stands a better chance of working with another Taftâni than any other Tradition.

On the bright side, the Zaotar have a certain nervous respect for the Kahin and will generally work with them with relatively few problems. For their part, the Kahin have no qualms with working together for a common goal and do it to devastating effect, as their recent reacquisition of Petra proves.

A well-balanced cabal of Weavers would probably be comprised of an equal number of Taftâni from the Zaotar and Kahin factions, with the latter acting as buffers between the former. Furthermore, if the cabal were led by a powerful or respected Kahin, not only would it assure that the cabal was acting in accordance with Qismat, but it might have the additional convenient side-effect of keeping the Zaotar from blasting each other out of the Tellurian.

One possibility for a mono-Traditional game is the basic drive of uniting against a greater enemy. It jibes perfectly with the Taftâni mindset to set aside differences, at least temporarily, to blast a mutual enemy into the sand. Even if Hannan al-Jebbel, called the Flame-wife, has been warring with Tariq Ibn Zaidi for decades, the moment a Technocratic or Nephandic force enters their battleground, both mages will turn their complete and unrestrained attention on the invader. The alliance may or may not last beyond the enemies' death, but at least it's a sign of what could be.

On the other hand, if a somewhat more proactive group of Taftâni wanted to take the battle to the Technocracy (or the Nephandi), then the game might start out in the mountains of Iran and move to Istanbul, Paris or New York. That's when it gets interesting.

Such games could possibly be the beginning of a new Taftâni movement toward cooperation, a notion that gives most Technocrats nightmares.

Basically, anything can unite a Taftâni cabal so long as it has the potential to temper the Weavers' egos and give them something to fight that serves their combative nature. How hot the fire needs to be to forge that kind of cohesiveness depends entirely on the players.



City of Brass

In the near realms of the Invisible World, near to the physical world that we know sits a city fashioned entirely of hammered copper and brass. Its towers rise higher than any in the Lands of Faith, and its eight great streets radiate outward from the palace in the center like the strands of a spider's web.

This is the City of Brass, the nearest citadel of the djinn and by far the most accessible to the inhabitants of the material world. Serving much as all border cities do, the City of Brass was for centuries the site of most if not all commerce—of whatever variety—taking place between humans and djinn. Since djinn in the Invisible World (and therefore in the City of Brass) are not subject to the Laws of Solomon, they did not need fear the mage's duplicity. The magoi, on the other hand, had to be at least somewhat alert lest the djinn deceive them with their tricks, though the Laws of Hospitality prevented any real unpleasantness.

Since only a few mages remember its existence, the City of Brass is almost entirely a city of Spirits. It is still ruled by the djinn caliph al-Dimiryat, who himself rarely if ever leaves the spectacular copper palace at the center of the city.

In lieu of its commerce with the Getig, or Visible World, the City of Brass serves now as a center for all manner of commerce taking place in the Invisible World. Demons angels, djinn, Nature spirits and odder things mingle in its scorching towers. The immense heat of the city obviously impacts the nature of the spirits found here. Spirits native to the extreme north or the extreme south avoid the City of Brass.

In recent decades, a Void Engineer outpost has monitored the city. It watches specifically for mages entering to deal with djinn and watches where they return to the material world. The Void Engineers, for their part, consider it some sort of extra-dimensional anomaly — perhaps a result of parallel evolution.

Al-Dimiryat dislikes the Void Engineers and monitors the outpost in return. Those abiding in the City of Brass ignore the VE's armored enclave for the most part, but they know the outpost's crew, its weaponry, its weak and strong points. Once the caliph's patience reaches an end, the outpost will learn the hard way why the Taftâni do not trust the djinn.

Laws of the City of Brass

The only laws in place to manage interactions in the City of Brass are the ancient traditions of hospitality:

1 All civil entities are welcome and should be greeted in a manner that places them at ease.

2. No guest may kill or seek to harm his host.

3. No host may kill or seek to harm his guest.

4. Guests to the city should bring a gift for their host.

5. If he so chooses, and if he believes it will be of interest and delight to his host, a guest may tell his story as his gift.

6. The Caliph's word is absolute.

In these laws, the term host refers to the djinn who reside in the City of Brass and guest refers to any visitor to the City of Brass.

Iram of the Tall Columns

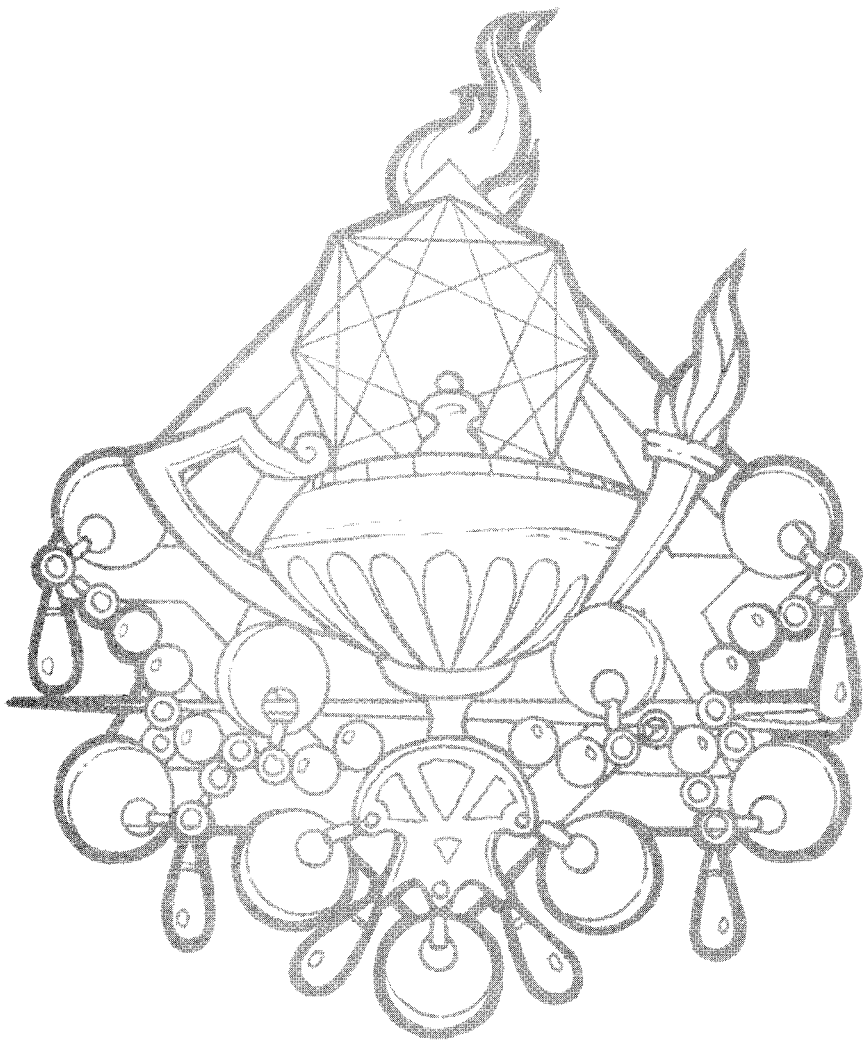
During the height of the Persian Empire, Shaddad, one of the greatest wizard kings of the Taftâni, built the only known horizon realm of the Taftâni. Shaddad created the city as an eternal gesture of love and respect for the human senses, and there is no mistaking his intent.

The buildings of Iram of the Tall Columns are, as the name would suggest, enormous. The pillars, made of ruby and aquamarine, rise forty feet. In the recesses of the high domed ceilings are eternally burning candles. Turquoise, pearl, onyx, alabaster and sapphire adorn everything in a manner that might seem somewhat garish to the modern eye. Tiny streams of sweet water meander through many of the rooms, ringing chimes that dangle in the water.

The thick walls are made of fragrant woods, mostly strongly scented cedar, and the aromas of musk and myrrh drift through the Realm as if from some pure and hidden source.

While Shaddad intended for Iram of the Tall Columns to be a place of rest and repose for Persian viziers, he also built it as his tomb. At the center of the beautiful city of Iram lies Shaddad's burial chamber, situated so as to allow Shaddad's dust to receive the benefits of all the magical luxuries of the city.

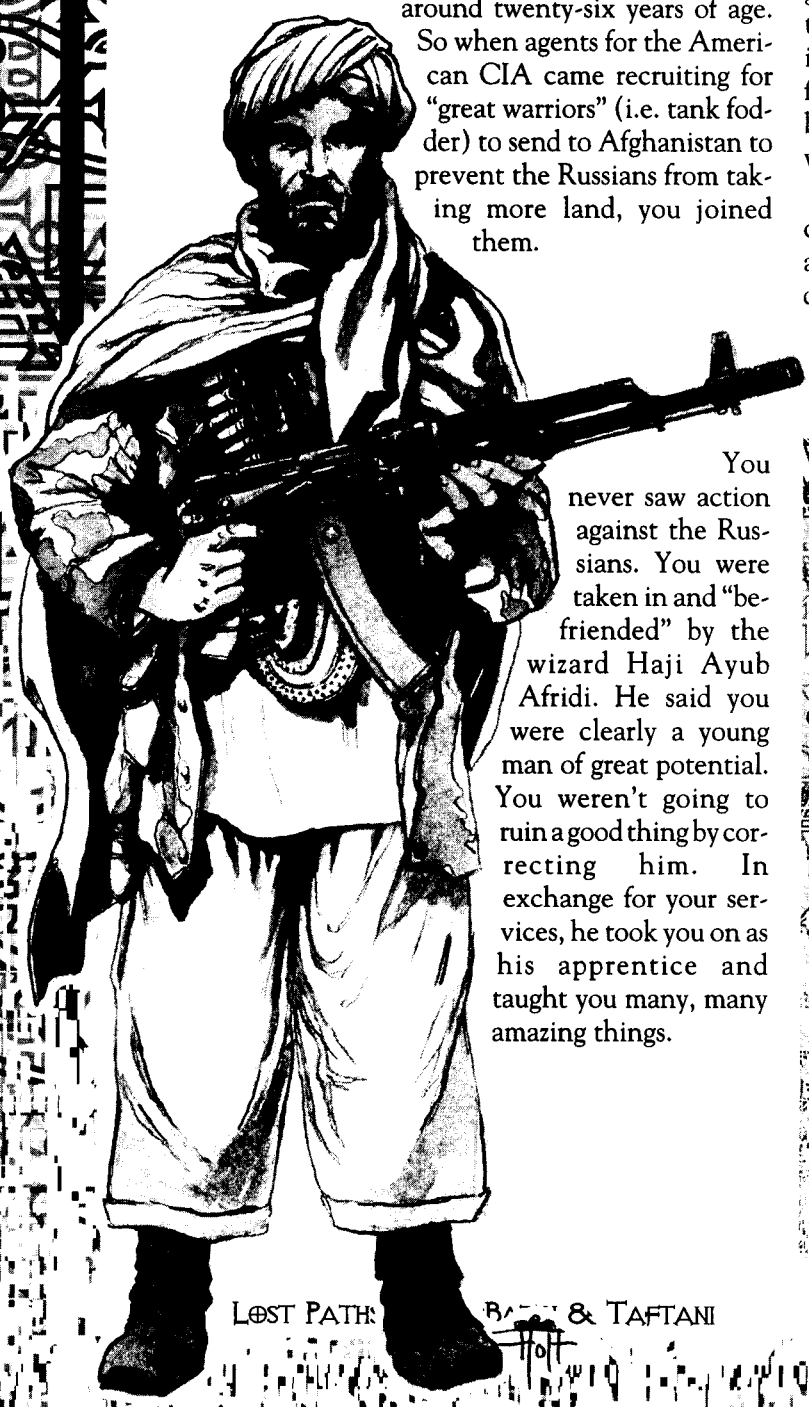
The site of the entrance to the Horizon Realm shifts according to the position of the stars, but in the current world almost all of the entrances are covered with sand. The last accidental discovery of Iram was in the seventh century during the reign of Mu'awaiyah, the first caliph of the Umayyads in southern Arabia. No tales refer to the city's discovery since then, though rumors have circulated among the Taftâni for centuries as to Iram's exact current whereabouts. Some say that the agents of Druj found it and dismantled the great city. Others say it was ripped apart by two warring Zaotars, both trying to claim it for themselves. Some whisper that some great old Taftâni masters have taken over Iram of the Tall Columns and that they watch from beyond the Horizon and invite those Taftâni who show the greatest ability to overcome their hostile natures and cooperate. The Kahin have uncommonly little to say about the topic of Iram, and some believe that the Kahin may have located the Realm by gazing long into the void of Qismat — and claimed it for themselves. That rumor by itself is responsible for more conflict between the two factions than anything else in the Tradition's millennia-spanning history.



Afghani Warlord

Quote: Burn with truth you damnable son of a scrofulous sow!

Prelude: You grew up in Tamanrasset, a city in the South of Algeria in a region controlled by bandits. The local schools had all been burned by the el-Djama'a el-islamia el Mosalaha, the friendly local Islamic terrorist organization, because, they claimed, studying took too much time away from the pious contemplation of the goodness of Allah. With no formal education past the age of 15, you had three options: join the Islamic extremists, join the army's war against the extremists, or join up with the bandits. In any case, your life expectancy topped off at somewhere around twenty-six years of age. So when agents for the American CIA came recruiting for "great warriors" (i.e. tank fodder) to send to Afghanistan to prevent the Russians from taking more land, you joined them.



You never saw action against the Russians. You were taken in and "befriended" by the wizard Haji Ayub Afridi. He said you were clearly a young man of great potential. You weren't going to ruin a good thing by correcting him. In exchange for your services, he took you on as his apprentice and taught you many, many amazing things.

Concept: You are now a warlord in your own right. You control a small *lashkar* of your very own, and though they're one meal away from being feral beasts they obey you unswervingly, because they have seen the things you're capable of. In the desolation of the Khyber Pass, you can give your magic free reign, a situation that gives you a great deal of satisfaction. You've now set your sights on expanding your territory. The only thing in your way is that *other* warlord who wants to do the same thing, but you know exactly how to deal with him.

Roleplaying Tips: Bluster. Wipe your mouth with your sleeve. Swear creatively. Recount old war stories and tell crude jokes. You're basically a nice, honorable guy; you're just a little rough around the edges. More than a little, in fact. You're a twenty-something barbarian with an enormous ego, too much testosterone flowing through your veins and training in the arts of both war and magic. You're basically a Technocrat's worst nightmare.

Magic: You weave your words into the fabric of clouds to seed them with storms, to call the lightning and to ride the wind like a *djinni*. What you can't affect directly, you have the *djinn* do for you.

Equipment: Black turban, AK-74, *djinni* ring, Soviet army surplus flak jacket

MAGE
THE ASCENSION

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Bon Vivant
Essence: Dynamic
Deitieanor: Fanatic
Craft: Taftâni
Concept: Afghani Warlord
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●●○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Crafts Glassblowing	●●○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Cosmology	●○○○○
Brawl	●●○○○	Firearms	●●○○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
Dodge	●●●●●	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	●●●●○	Occult	●●○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	●○○○○
Forces	●●●○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arete	Health	
Allies	●●●●●	●●●○○○○○○○	Bruised	-0 ☐
Avatar	●●○○○		Hurt	-1 ☐
	○○○○○	Willpower	Injured	-1 ☐
	○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Wounded	-2 ☐
	○○○○○	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐	Mauled	-2 ☐
			Crippled	-5 ☐
			Incapacitated	☐

Merits/Flaws
Daredevil (3 pt. Merit)
Deep Sleeper (1 pt. Flaw)
Vengeful (2 pt. Flaw)

Quintessence

Paradox

Resonance
Dynamic: Stormy ●○○○○
Entropic ○○○○○
Static ○○○○○

Experience

Lost Paths: Ba[illegible] & Taftani

Kahin

Quote: No, don't ask to hear my poetry. You don't want to.

Prelude: You grew up in Granada, Spain in the shadow of the Alhambra, which always felt more magical to you than the enormous cathedral you were dragged to three times a week for mass.

You knew for years that you were different. So did your peers, who said you were weird. At least that was the excuse they gave for hating you. You were drawn to daydreaming and writing poetry, and everything else took third place. Fortunately for you, your poetry was undeniably good, occasionally visionary and, from time to time, even prophetic. Your grandmother said you were blessed by Jesus, but that always struck you as bullshit.

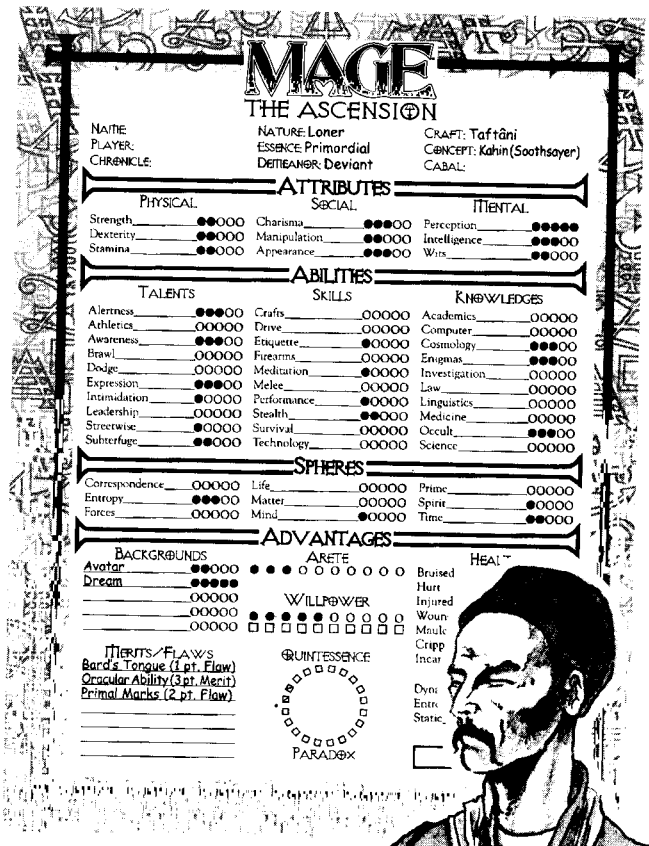
To escape your peers and their adolescent persecution, you took long hikes in the hills outside of town, which is where you were when you met a weird Gypsy guy who summed up the essence of your entire life in a twelve-line poem. He asked if you wanted to know more and he invited you to the cave he called home. As it turned out, he wasn't Gypsy, but Arab, and he had a lot to show you. Things your grandmother would *not* approve of. So you left home to stay with him, causing a scandal of legendary proportions in so doing. Now there are days — weeks even — when it seems you can't speak a single verse without it coming true in one way or another.

Concept: You're weird, gloriously, wondrously, and undeniably so, and you have no qualms with that. It was qismat that you should be so, just as it was qismat that brought you and the wily old poet together. You like unnerving the nervous and scaring the timid, and you don't hesitate to curse those who cross you one too many times.

Roleplaying Tips: You see Truth even when it's hidden, and it makes the most amazing weapon. Tell people unflattering truths about themselves that they need to hear. Intimidate the pious with your "ungodly" ways. If anyone gets out of line or refuses to treat you with the respect you deserve, compose a lengthy poem that curses them, their children and their children's children. Maybe *that* will teach them some respect.

Magic: You know things. When you gaze at length into a fire, you see things: things that have happened, or that will come to pass. When you enter a poetic trance, the verse that drips from your tongue doesn't just predict things, it makes those predictions come true. And if that weren't enough, you also talk to spirits who tell you things. Your grandmother had no idea how right — and how wrong — she was.

Equipment: Notebook of poetic lines, lighter, skull of a cat (around your neck), mirror, dagger (in a sheath up your sleeve)


MAGE
THE ASCENSION

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Loner
Essence: Primordial
Demeanor: Deviant
Craft: Taftâni
Concept: Kahin (Soothsayer)
Cabal:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	●●●○○	Etiquette	●○○○○	Cosmology	●●●○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●●○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Meditation	●○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	●●●○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○	Performance	●○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Streetwise	●○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Occult	●●●○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Technology	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	○○○○○
Entropy	●●●○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	●○○○○
Forces	○○○○○	Mind	●○○○○	Time	●●○○○

ADVANTAGES

Backgrounds	
Avatar	●●○○○
Dream	●●●●●
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

Merits/Flaws
Bard's Tongue (1 pt. Flaw)
Oracular Ability (3 pt. Merit)
Primal Marks (2 pt. Flaw)

Arete ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Quintessence

Paradox

Heal
Bruised
Hurt
Injured
Wounded
Mauled
Crippled
Incap
Dying
Enter
Static

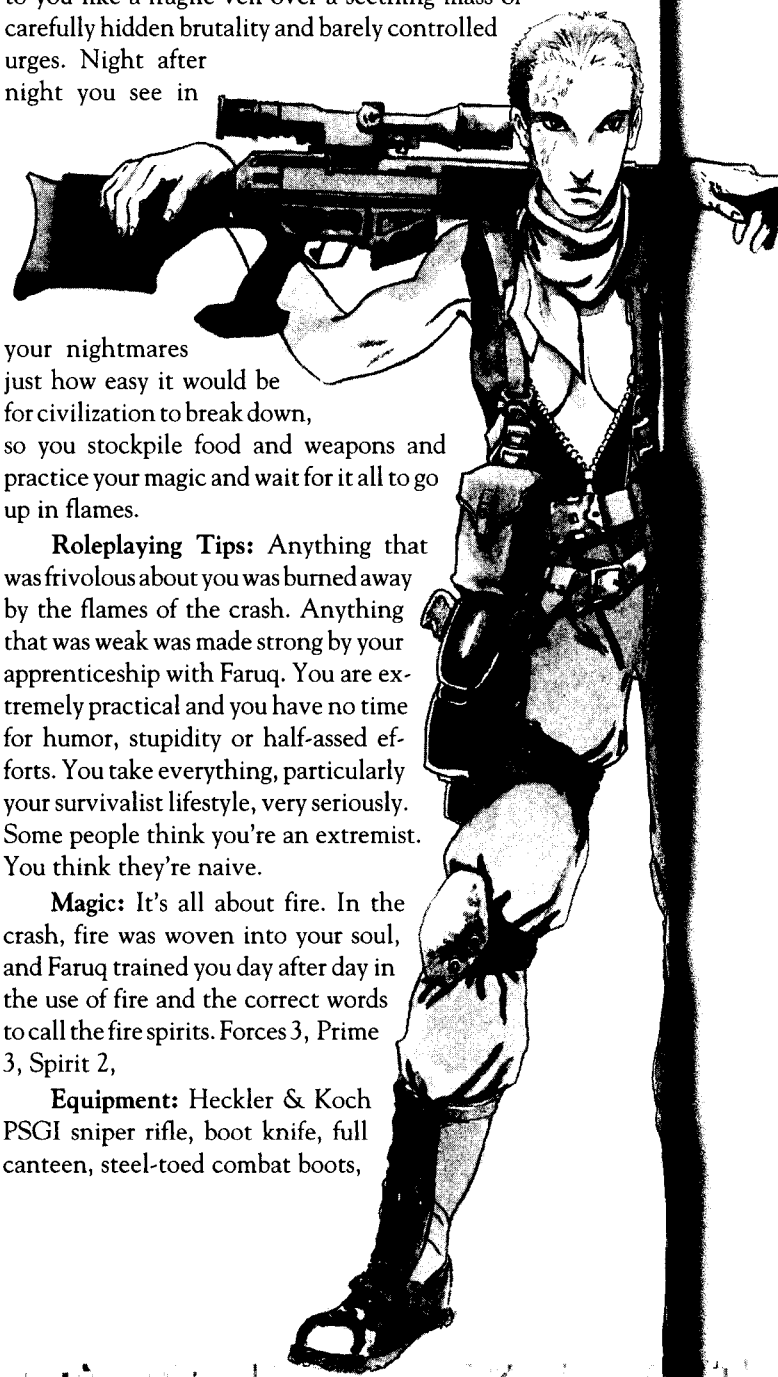
Death Valley Survivalist

Quote: You're on private property. I think you'd better turn your car around and leave. Now.

Prelude: You grew up in rural Montana where you were the homecoming queen. You were the only child, so it was up to you to follow in your father's footsteps and join the Air Force. Not only did you distinguish yourself as a great pilot, but you got to be one of the few women pilots flying bombing sorties in the Gulf War. Until you were shot down. You ejected from the plane only to land in the burning town you had just been bombing. Your chute caught fire as it came down on top of you, and the sticky burning nylon stuck to you.... You realized you were going to die. Not just die, but burn to death. In fact, when you saw the guy fly down on the carpet, you were pretty sure you were three quarters of the way to brain death. When the fire just disappeared, you weren't certain what was happening. And then he took you back to his remarkable home and trained you in the ways of Weaving magic while you recovered from your extensive burns.

You had been listed among the dead, so when you returned home eight years after the war ended, people were surprised. The pity on their faces when they saw the burn scars on your face made you want to incinerate them then and there. They were surprised again when you moved from Red Lodge to Death Valley and started acting like a hermit and gun nut. They chalked it up to combat fatigue and forgot about you. Again. It's better that way.

Concept: You're a tough woman, still attractive beneath the scars. You received a great deal of survival training and then had to use it. Being out in the really real world disabused you of the comforting illusions that growing up in the happy-go-lucky United States imparted upon you. Upon returning home, you were shocked by the ubiquitous naiveté and the attention people gave to trivial things like video games, television, which options package they wanted for their SUV... The people in your hometown were blind to what things are really like, and when you tried to tell them, they accused you of being depressed and strongly suggested Prozac. So you left for Death Valley. Civilization now looks to you like a fragile veil over a seething mass of carefully hidden brutality and barely controlled urges. Night after night you see in your nightmares just how easy it would be for civilization to break down, so you stockpile food and weapons and practice your magic and wait for it all to go up in flames.



Roleplaying Tips: Anything that was frivolous about you was burned away by the flames of the crash. Anything that was weak was made strong by your apprenticeship with Faruq. You are extremely practical and you have no time for humor, stupidity or half-assed efforts. You take everything, particularly your survivalist lifestyle, very seriously. Some people think you're an extremist. You think they're naive.

Magic: It's all about fire. In the crash, fire was woven into your soul, and Faruq trained you day after day in the use of fire and the correct words to call the fire spirits. Forces 3, Prime 3, Spirit 2,

Equipment: Heckler & Koch PSG1 sniper rifle, boot knife, full canteen, steel-toed combat boots,

MAGE THE ASCENSION

Name: | Nature: Masochist | Craft: Taftâni
Player: | Essence: Dynamic | Concept: Survivalist
Chronicle: | Deitheanor: Loner | Cabal:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	●●●●○	Computer	●○○○○
Awareness	●●○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○	Cosmology	●○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	●●●○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Dodge	●●●●○	Meditation	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Expression	●○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Survival	●●○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Technology	●○○○○	Science	○○○○○

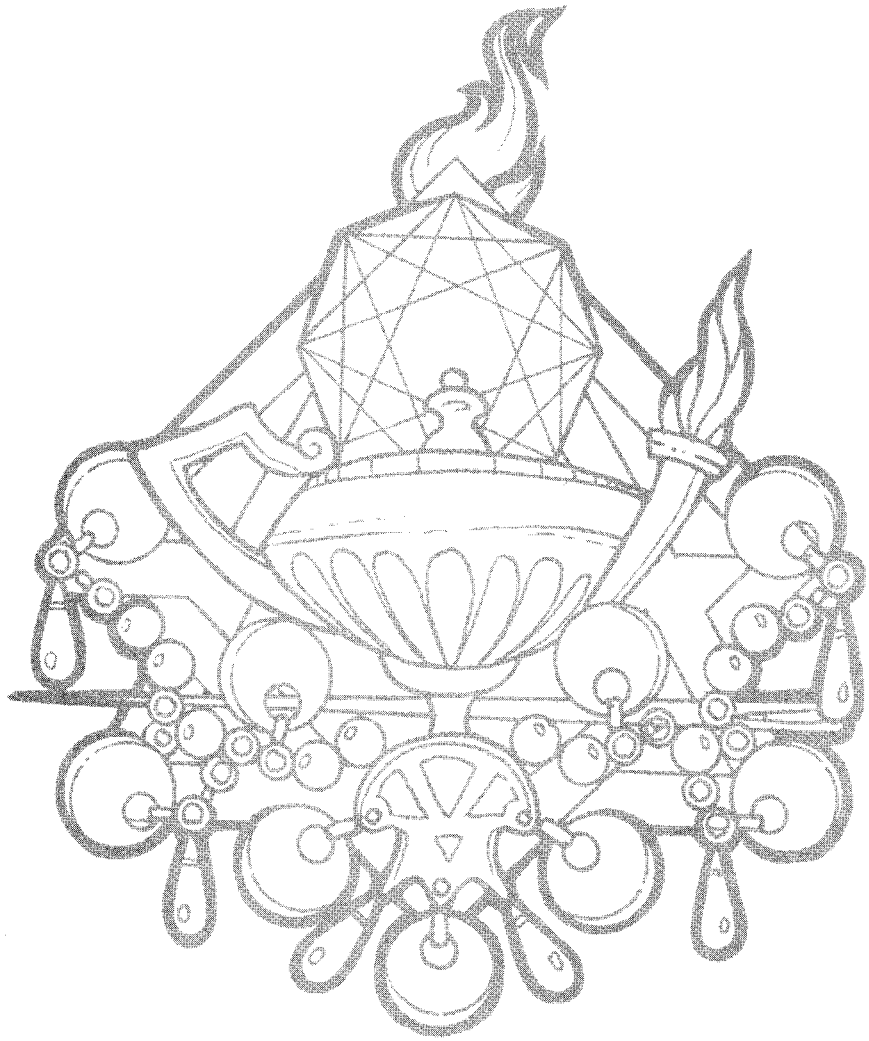
Spheres

Correspondence	○○○○○	Life	○○○○○	Prime	●●○○○
Entropy	○○○○○	Matter	○○○○○	Spirit	●●○○○
Forces: Primal Elements	●●●○○	Mind	○○○○○	Time	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Arete		Health	
Mentor	●○○○○	● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○		Bruised	-0 ☐
Resources	●○○○○			Hurt	-1 ☐
Wonder	●●●●●	Willpower		Injured	-1 ☐
	○○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●		Wounded	-2 ☐
	○○○○○	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐		Mauled	-2 ☐
				Crippled	-5 ☐
				Incapacitated	☐

Merits/Flaws	Quintessence	Resonance	
Lame (3 pt. Flaw)		Dynamic: Incendiary	●○○○○
Nightmares (1 pt. Flaw)		Entropic	○○○○○
Diminished Attribute – Appearance (3pt Flaw)		Static	○○○○○
	Paradox	Experience	



Chapter Three: Djinn

And indeed, We created man from a clay of black mud.
and the djinn We created aforetime from the smokeless flame of fire.
— The Koran, Al-Hijr 15:26-27

History



No book detailing the wizards of the sands and Lands of Faith would be complete without addressing djinn, the denizens of the Invisible World mentioned in sources as disparate as the Koran and the *Arabian Nights*. These entities can be thought of as natural, though not always desirable, manifestations of the Invisible World on the material plane. Since djinn, like spirits, yet remain a part of the static reality — in all but the most ossified and deadened places on Earth (e.g., doctor's offices, Technocracy weapons labs and corporate board rooms) — they are able to function normally, neither suffering from Paradox nor needing to feed on Quintessence to remain in the physical world.

Djinn in the World of Darkness occupy a place somewhere between that of spirits and Bygones. They're just a little too solid and self-aware to be concepts given flesh or simple incarnations of natural phenomena as most spirits are. Neither are they quite solid or odd enough to trigger static reality's immune system, thereby causing them to fade away (or become thaumivorous). It's possible that djinn are Bygones whose place in the world was so entrenched that they're fading from it a little more slowly than most such creatures.

What follows is a description of the djinn, their history, their abilities and how to incorporate them into your game. If you allow Taftâni player characters, you have, de facto, allowed djinn into your game, since a great deal of Taftâni life revolves around enslaving these entities and commanding them to do their bidding.

ORIGINS

You have come to me and asked me to tell you the story of the creation of the djinn. Very well then, you shall hear it if it takes one night and a hundred more. With each night there are fewer of our kind to tell this story. Many of us have been imprisoned by your kind — by the viziers or mages of the humans. Many have fallen in battle, and many have fallen to the temptations of the demons and have themselves become demonic efriti, long since abandoning the Invisible World for the company of Iblis in Hell.

As I remember it, the djinn were Allah's first attempt at free-willed beings. We were created after elemental spirits but before human beings walked the world. Nor were we created out of nothingness. Needing something to start with, The One Who Is Not Not took smokeless fire and gave it spirit and form and life. We hundred thousand spirits spread out across the world, lay claim to those places where the power of the world flowed most freely, and there established the noble courts of the djinn.

We were the pinnacle of creation. We were vibrant and creative souls. We created and learned and built citadels and did as we pleased. No other spirit was so perfect as we. We lacked nothing. Not only were we the first creatures to have truly free will, but we were immortal as well. The passage of time does not harm us; rather it simply allows us to grow more powerful. We were to shepherd the beasts and command the spirits and guide the world into everlasting harmony. Our existence, it seemed to us, was perfect and unblemished.

In time another kind of creature was created as well, one that was more base, more prone to folly and imperfection. These newcomers were made from black mud and lived more in the physical world than the spiritual, and they were frail and stupid and the passage of time made them grow weak and die. These new creatures, these graceless afterthoughts, were called humans. As intermediaries between the spiritual world and the physical world, it was our job to shepherd them as well, though we soon began to think of them as our less talented and somewhat deformed cousins.

It was our understanding in those early times that we were to be the dominant creatures in the world, ruling over the beasts and our lesser cousins, the humans. This is how the world was for centuries, and we were able to teach our grunting kin how to use the gifts of spirit, how to use tools, how to safely create and use fire for comfort. Humans were capable of learning and transmitting what they knew, and we taught them well. We became less ashamed of our ties to them and sought to teach them all of what we knew. We were their teachers and they accepted the knowledge we shared with them.

Somewhere along the way, that arrangement became obsolete. Humans, though less attuned to the spiritual world, were quick to master the physical world, and they did so in ways that the djinn were not substantial enough to mimic, not the least of which was rapid reproduction. Whereas the acts that lead to reproduction were considered base and somewhat foul to the djinn, those acts seemed quite agreeable to humans. It did not take the humans terribly long to outnumber us. Once humans began to learn certain spiritual arts, which they called magic, the balance of power began to shift, and we, the first people, were forced to keep up with the mischief and the numbers of the rapidly expanding human race.

It was around then that the shifters, those creatures that were part human, part spirit and part animal, approached us. They informed us that the great houses of spirits were all making a pledge of reciprocal assistance with them, and that if we would teach them our Charms, they would, in return, serve us with their mighty beast-people power.

We would have nothing to do with them. Other spirits may be stupid enough to grant chiminage to these barbarians, but we had already seen how dangerous humans could become and how quickly they had become a blight on the world. We had no interest in either serving or being served by beasts. If anything, we were left disgusted by the notion of interacting with beast-men at all, which, as I recall, we found both base and servile.

The djinn began avoiding the physical world, preferring to establish ourselves in places where most of the human vermin could not go: the Invisible World. Our natures required us to live in both the visible world and the Invisible World. Retreating permanently to the latter was not a step we could take without potentially losing our ability to function fully in both worlds. In whatever ways we could, we retreated from the swarming human race, seeking either the solace of the empty place in the physical world or the great expanses of the spirit that were accessible to us. While the shifters and some few viziers could reach our citadels and sites of power in the Invisible World, most of them were wise enough to avoid those places where the djinn held sway, lest they be punished for their effrontery. In those places, at least, the djinn were still the masters and the humans were still slaves and monkeys compared to the collective might of the djinn.

THE 10,000 DJINN PLAGUE

In the visible world, humans became more cognizant of the existence of djinn and began trying to figure the djinn out. Dabblers in magic took the first steps at entering into pacts with the djinn. More often than not, once the would-be spirit master got what he wanted, he conveniently forgot to honor his side of the bargain. The already strained relations between the visible and invisible worlds became even more tenuous. 965 years before the beginning of what is now called the Current Era, the greatest human vizier among the humans, Suleiman (also known as Solomon the Wise) moved to consolidate human power in the Lands of Faith. By

constructing an enormous temple at the confluence of many lines of power and establishing a college for the teaching of the magical arts, the great Suleiman inadvertently tipped the precarious balance of power in favor of the humans and triggered a wave of grave concern among those of us in the Invisible World. Initially it was determined that the best course of action was to let the humans build their little temple and to simply watch as human incompetence or aggression brought the temple back down.

What we didn't realize is that Suleiman's knowledge of magic had grown so vast that he had learned how to command us to do his bidding. This was new; prior to Suleiman's discovery and codification of what was later called the Solomonic Code, humans could enter into pacts with djinn or they could coax and plead and we would think about helping them if there was something in it for us. It was an atrocity that humans had learned skills that allowed them to command us, but we did not discover that he had such secrets until it was too late.

For twenty years we watched nervously, waiting for some human stupidity to sunder the great and orderly city of Suleiman and bring his city down. To our dismay, it didn't happen. What did happen troubled us greatly: The humans established a thriving civilization with flourishing trade routes, a relatively just and respected legal system and a burgeoning population of priest-magi looking out for the interests of humanity...more and more frequently at the expense of the inhabitants of the Invisible World.

We watched for twenty years as our control over the visible world became more and more tenuous. In 945 BCE, the great khans and pashas of the Invisible World held a court of war wherein they agreed that the meddling of humans, in what we held to be our world, had to come to an end. The decision was made to make war upon the humans, by whatever means necessary, to control their numbers and drive them from territories where djinn were firmly established which, at the time, included most of Israel, Persia and all of the Arabian Peninsula.

Throughout those lands we began to wreak havoc. Djinn began terrorizing the trade routes and cities, the oases and temples of the humans. We expected our first attacks to scatter the humans like orange blossoms before a strong wind. They did not. Instead, they gathered together in their cities like lambs huddling together in a storm. We thought the rest would be easy, but we underestimated them.

The first sign that something was wrong was the steady rhythm of hammers that began to ring from their cities day and night. When djinn informants tried to enter the cities to discover the cause for the unceasing ring of metal, they were kept out by invisible barriers that the viziers had erected all around the city.

These creatures we had been given authority over had learned to bar us from their city. That was an outrage that we could not forgive. Immediately, the great caliph Al-Dimiryat was summoned to redress this insult. He was more than powerful enough to trample through the wards that blocked his entry into the city, but he did not anticipate that he would be met by Suleiman himself just within the city. The caliph had barely passed into the city when six viziers stepped up to restore the wards he had destroyed, and before the great djinn lord could smite the human, Suleiman the wise held out a brazen flask and Al-Dimiryat, one of the grand caliphs of the djinn, was sucked in.

Suleiman immediately placed a stopper in the flask, immersed the top in molten lead, thereby sealing it, and, as soon as the lead had cooled, the greatest and most hated of all viziers inscribed the first of what would come to be known as the Seals of Solomon.

The entirety of the Invisible World was chilled. Al-Dimiryat was gone, to what fate none knew. The city was again impenetrable, and the first victory had gone to the humans whom we had for so long considered our inferiors.

It was only to get worse from there.

The pashas, emirs and assorted lords who had served Al-Dimiryat were incensed and had no idea what to do.

The other caliphs were struck with fear that what had happened to their brother could happen to them. They vowed never to leave the safety of the Invisible World, and even as they did so, they sent their minions even more aggressively against the humans and especially against the city of Suleiman.

There is little to say that has not been written and debated by djinn scholars for centuries. The Arabian Peninsula and most of Persia was overrun with angry djinn. The battle mostly took place between the viziers and the djinn, although frustrated djinn frequently took their anger out on "innocent" humans.

The trade routes were hit the hardest because that's where the humans were weakest. Their food and goods were easy to disrupt, whereas the cities were havens for any number of viziers, and they had taken to spreading the information used by Suleiman. Djinn were being imprisoned by the scores. Every conceivable type of container — glass bottles, iron flasks, copper cucurbites, brass alembics, oil lamps — had been prepared and inscribed with powerful Solomonic seals. The formulae for bindings and wardings had been so widely spread that they were being used even by those who weren't proper viziers at all. In addition to djinn, the wizards used their newfound magical techniques to capture and imprison all manner of spirits. Troublesome djinn were the primary targets of these zealots, of course, but demons, naturae, and even the ghosts of the dead were captured. What began as an attempt to keep the humans in

line turned into a complete disaster as djinn forces were routed at every turn.

Viziers who usually lived in the depths of the desert came forth to learn what Suleiman had to teach. They would leave Israel in the caravans crossing the sands, and if djinn or demons began accosting the group, the magicians would toss down metal vials by the handful and bind any spirit unfortunate enough to get in the way.

Suleiman began paying a bounty to viziers who brought him captured spirits. In his enormous sanctum, surrounded by the gathered mystics of a dozen lands, the Wise One would interrogate spirits about their nature, their role in Creation and their strengths and weaknesses. Sages recorded more about the nature of spirits during that time than at any time before or since. And it was only the beginning of Suleiman's great plan.

Vessels filled with spirits and djinn came to Suleiman by the hundreds and he faithfully paid viziers for turning their catch over to him.

Once he had learned our secrets, our weaknesses, our vices and our needs, he quickly learned to command us to do his bidding. When he was certain he had all the information he needed on commanding our kind, he freed Al-Dimiryat and ordered him to be his lieutenant. He could do nothing else. Once the caliph himself sided with Suleiman, there was nothing else to be done.

At the height of the War of Enslavement, fully half of all djinn were imprisoned and the majority of the rest were in service to Suleiman or some other arrogant vizier. The most powerful demons and djinn had been rendered incapable of crossing the barrier between worlds. Banished to the Invisible World, the greatest of the djinn began to forget the visible world and their painful defeat. Those djinn who were still free, however, felt the loss of the Visible World most keenly and their rage made devils of them.

In the years to come, the viziers of the human world would come to call this conflict the 10,000 Djinn Plague. We, however, called it the War of Enslavement, and our bitterness at its outcome has only grown sharper with the passage of time.

That bitterness erupted again a millennium later as many of our number — a majority of those who escaped being bound by Suleiman — sided with the blatantly malevolent Devil-Kings to make another strike against the human race.

The Devil King Age

Beginning around 100 CE, a loose alliance of banes, corrupt viziers, demons and djinn rallied behind a demonic wizard named Ishaq al-Iblis to create a society in the lost places of the world that celebrated the infliction of pain and the visitation of horror upon the human race. Many free



djinn, still nursing a consuming anger over the outcome of the War of Enslavement, saw it as their opportunity to make war upon humanity and avenge themselves on the race that had stolen their place in the world and turned them into prisoners and slaves.

Unlike the War of Enslavement, this new conflict was not motivated by djinn ideology or arrogance but by resentment and hatred. Even djinn not naturally inclined toward malice aligned themselves with the Devil Kings, seeing service to Iblis as preferable to service to the weak and scheming race of humans. The results were predictably grim.

The few free djinn who preferred not to join the forces of the Devil Kings went into hiding or were forced into servitude to the Arabic sorcerers who were by that time calling themselves the Taftâni, which meant Weavers.

While djinn had grown quite shy of entering direct combat with humans thanks to the ubiquity of Solomonic lore, they were more than eager to help build the cities of the Devil Kings whose names have come down as synonyms for suffering and horror: Arraka, Bhât, Kyphon, Zughb and myriad others. Many djinn were under the impression that by serving the Devil Kings behind the scenes they enjoyed the best of both worlds: they were able to take a form of venegeance on the human race but they were still innocent of the greater outrages committed by the Devil Kings, and thus less culpable should the amirs denounce such a course of action.

When the twisted human vizier named Ishaq al-Iblis approached a number of djinn and invited — not ordered — them to join "a great drive to punish every last man, woman and child of the human race," most joined gladly.

The impotent rage we felt at seeing our brothers and sisters captured and placed into servitude to a race of idiots was channeled into the creation of increasingly grand citadels of horror and pain.

For the first hundred years of the reign of the Devil Kings, the djinn were instrumental in creating the Devil King's empire. Every Charm in our repertoire was placed at the devils' disposal. The aroma of roasting human flesh almost made up for the anger we felt toward those who had, in many respects, banished us from the physical world.

Most djinn, however, were not entirely comfortable serving the truly evil Devil Kings. While many djinn were willing to swear temporary allegiance to the various demons and Nephandi as a means of taking revenge on the human race, once that hunger for vengeance was slaked, most djinn lost interest in the Devil Kings' campaign and almost all later grew to regret the atrocities they had committed in the name of revenge.

The Quiescence

After the War of Enslavement and the centuries of bitterness and repercussions that followed it, the vast majority of djinn opted to have as little to do with the human world as they could manage. Most were happy to retreat to the Invisible World where humans — most of them, anyway — were unable to follow. Our power, however, comes from being in both worlds. A djinni who spends too much time in only one world may, with time, lose the ability to flow between the two. There are some who claim that a djinni who remains too long in the visible world forgets Charms, loses his ability to return to the Invisible World and becomes one of the jann. While the amaar may find that to be a noble goal, the rest of us do not.

The Recent Return

The horror of the War of Enslavement lingered with the djinn for centuries. All but a wayward few were content to leave the visible world alone except for the occasional foray sparked by morbid curiosity regarding the habits of mortals.

The lessons of the past, which the wiser among our number remember well, are lost on younger djinn. They never experienced the fear and shock caused by the War of Enslavement. They haven't lost friends or loved ones to the prison of a bottle. They are spared the viciousness of human slavers, the revered djinn lost to the arts of arrogant viziers and the terrible resulting defection of the efriti to the Devil Kings. It's all quaint history and folklore to them. It means nothing.

And when they decide to explore and experience wonders, the Invisible World isn't enough for them. Despite the threat of enslavement, they insist on claiming their birthright: full access to both worlds. I respect that even while I find it foolhardy. It's possible that this new breed of djinn is cleverer, less likely to fall prey to lead-stoppered copper flasks and wily viziers. Perhaps the knowledge of Suleiman's art is less prevalent than it once was. If that's the case, then perhaps they'll fare better in the visible world than we did.

Perhaps.

I'm not optimistic. I suspect they're simply rash and unwise, and once the viziers realize that a whole new crop of slaves has ripened, they'll be more than ready for the harvest.

Regardless of what kismet holds in store for them, the facts remain the same: young djinn are entering the visible world in large numbers. Many of them are choosing to interact with humans on a regular basis. So far, very few of them have fallen prey to the Weavers and their ilk. I say it's just a matter of time.

Organization



The djinn are an entire house of spirits unto themselves, and as such the power levels of djinn span the gamut from drones, barely more powerful than humans all the way up to sultans whose power is, in a word, godlike. Djinn are further split by ideology and elemental affinity. Most djinn of a malevolent disposition have elemental affinities to flame or earth while benevolent djinn tend to exhibit a strong connection to the elements of air and water.

The Invisible World is the djinn term for those places in the Umbra where djinn are most numerous. Other spirits are present as well, but the djinn, in their traditionally high-handed way, ignore them if at all possible.

Within the Invisible World are a number of citadels, the enormous cities of the djinn. The djinn based their citadels upon images of the ideal cities that float through the High Umbra; mages are unlikely to see anything else even approaching the grandeur of a citadel without going to a Horizon Realm. Enormous towers of smooth golden glass rise out of vast seas of sand. Tree spirits stand on corners along every street and every intersection sports a fountain. Djinn fly from tower to tower attending to their business.

In the minds of the djinn, one proof of their superiority to humans is in their more beautiful and more efficient cities. Even the most beautiful human cities look like slums in comparison.

Citadels are governed by a caliph, generally an old and powerful djinn. In djinn terms, "old" generally means the djinn is between six and ten millennia of age.

Caliphs, in turn, are governed by an amir. An amir typically advises eight caliphs in one region of the Invisible World. Should a problem arise between citadels, the caliphs are advised to bring the problem to the amirs, who are considered to be wiser because of their greater age. Amirs range in age from nine to fifteen millennia old.

The sultanate rules the amirs. The sultanate is a family (of sorts) comprising the oldest and most powerful djinn. The djinn sultans are beings of such vast age and power that their actions are utterly inscrutable to any but others of similar age and experience. They are the kinds of entities that humans are wont to call gods.

Varieties of *Djinn*

Shayateen

The shayateen are those djinn who, while not evil *per se*, are the avowed enemies of humanity and self-appointed defenders of the Invisible World. A shayatan may guard the citadels of the djinn against incursion (or even visitation) from the visible world, or he may enter the visible world fully intending to trick, trap or harm a human. On those occasions when the shayateen leave the Invisible World, it's most often to avenge a loved one who was trapped or poorly treated by a mage. Shayateen, for the most part, feel that less interaction between the worlds is preferable to more.

The shayateen are, by all accounts, zealots. They see human control over the visible world to be a travesty and a situation that came about through guile and dishonorable behavior. While they don't generally delude themselves into thinking that they'll ever be able to take the visible world back, they do everything they can to harry and harm mages who get out of hand (however the djinn defines *that*) or who treat their djinn unkindly.

Talking with the shayateen is almost impossible for a human. First of all, they believe that every mage's intent is to trap them. Secondly, they have such disdain for humans that they can barely bring themselves to interact civilly with them. Lastly, even if a mortal enters into a dialogue with a shayatan, the whole discussion will be nothing but a political rant about the unfairness of the situation between humans and djinn.

Shayateen are not proud. In their war on their human oppressors, there is nothing they will not do to punish arrogant mages (and the innocent friends and family members of mages). Expecting a shayatan to show pity or "fight the good fight" is like expecting a camel to grow wings and fly: a nice idea, but none too likely.

Efrit

Efriti are those djinn who have sided with the forces of malevolence and corruption. Just before and during the Devil-King Age, a number of djinn, motivated by their unmitigated rage at the denizens of the visible world, made a mass migration to the courts of Malfeas. It became politically expedient to forge alliances with various forces that the djinn would normally not associate with. Once the Devil-King Age ended, it

The City of Brass

Long before the War of Enslavement and Suleiman's great magic, a trio of human *viziers* decided that the way to eternal fame was to build the most spectacular city ever seen by the eyes of men. Basing their ideas on the grand edifices they had seen in the spirit world, the viziers drew out exactly what the city was to look like. The towers of this city would be the tallest ever seen; its walls would be thick enough to withstand the greatest weapons a wizard could devise. Better yet, the streets would be constructed to facilitate interactions between those who lived there, building a strong sense of community. These viziers fancied themselves idealists of the highest caliber and spent hours discussing the ways in which the design of their city would nurture the virtues that underpinned civilization. Once they determined what shape the buildings of the city should take, these viziers deemed their command of the spirits sufficient to command a group of djinn to build their city for them. Without the Solomonic code in place, these early magi could only enter into loose agreements with the djinn, which they did. They did not take into account the djinn's ability to deceive.

The djinn insisted that they did not want to build a city for the viziers that they would not use, so they insisted that the viziers swear that they would reside in the city for as long as they should live. The viziers so swore and the djinn disappeared to begin their work.

The djinn built the city exactly as the viziers had imagined it. They did not build it *where* the viziers had imagined it. On the contrary, the city was built in the middle of an utterly inhospitable desert. Furthermore, the city was built entirely out of various kinds of brass. When the viziers protested, the djinn said, rightly, that the viziers never specified either setting or materials. When accused of dishonest dealing, the djinn pointed out, rightly, that they had even placed the city on a great node, ostensibly for the convenience of the viziers.

The djinn took that opportunity to remind the viziers that they had sworn to reside in the city as long as they lived. The viziers challenged this...and lost.

The three viziers had to use a great deal of their magic simply to stay alive in the buildings of sun-heated brass, and while all three of them lived to ripe old age, none of the three had much inclination to deal with the djinn again.

Once the last of the viziers had died, the djinn translated the City of Brass into the Invisible World.

Initially the city was little more than a curiosity, but after the War of Enslavement, it came to symbolize djinn victory over humankind and quickly became the preferred home of the *efrit*, those djinn who had declared themselves the avowed enemies of mankind.

The City of Brass is now the premier city of the Invisible World. Most djinn residing there prefer not to think about humankind at all. When creatures from the visible world visit, they are requested to leave unless they have pressing business there.

became notably less trendy to be evil, and with their anger spent, most djinn who sided with the various Malfeans returned to their citadels.

Some did not.

Those djinn who continue to serve the forces of Malfeas are the efriti. The various djinn caliphs and amirs continue to allow efriti to live in their citadels, but any efrit who tries to proselytize for Malfeas is immediately considered to be a rajîm and banished from the Invisible World.

An efrit's primary goal is to corrupt, twist and degrade human civilization as much as possible in hopes that it will implode upon itself. Most efriti claim to do this only to avenge those djinn who were casualties of the War of Enslavement, but the malice that radiates off of them makes it clear that their motivations are darker than mere politics.

Most efriti are looked down upon throughout the djinn citadels of the Invisible World and choose to live in Malfeas near those who have become their masters. Often, this takes the efriti to the courts of Kerne, in the heart of the balefire realms of Malfeas.

An interesting fact concerning the efriti is that no matter what their original elemental inclinations, efriti who stay any length of time in Malfeas always wind up being aligned with fire and using fire-based Charms. Those efriti who have been in Malfeas the longest don't even make use of normal fire, but prefer using their Charms to produce the sickly green flames called balefire.

Efriti, being more willful and intelligent than common Banes, are frequently assigned by the darker powers of Malfeas to lead banes and formori on missions to the visible world, and at least one efrit has become a Vice-President at a large corporation associated with the Pentex conglomerate.

Aamar

An aamar is an expatriate djinn who leaves the Invisible World to live among humans and "see how the other kind lives." She may have grown weary of the intense formality of life in the Invisible World or she may simply be looking to enhance the long days of immortality with a bit of debauchery.

Whatever the case, amaar prefer to travel incognito. They rarely stay in the Middle East, preferring the large cities abroad where they're less likely to stumble upon magicians capable of recognizing or enslaving them. Amaar have formed small communities in certain intriguing cities around the world, including Berlin, Cologne, London, New Orleans, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco and Sydney.

Most amaar prefer to be perceived as humans. They do not like dealing with other spirits or taking any other actions that require them to acknowledge that they are, in fact, djinn.

If they're comfortable staying in one place, they may set up legal human identities. Not infrequently, they enter into relationships with humans. As beings of spirit who can take any form they desire, amaar don't place a great deal of emphasis on gender and may take lovers of either sex. If the aamar takes a lover of the opposite sex, it is possible for the two to bear children, which are called jann.

The goal of most amaar is simply to disappear into human society. For that reason, using Charms is generally considered "cheating." An aamar is just as capable of using Charms as any other djinn, but doing so in the course of day-to-day life is typically seen as showing weakness; if humans can exist without using Charms, their reasoning goes, then djinn should be able to do the same thing. Obviously, if the aamar is under attack, he'll use Charms to defend himself, but outside of extreme circumstances, the whole point of being one of the amaar is to experience, as much as possible, the trials and limitations of human life.

Most djinn in the Invisible World find amaar both inexplicable and exasperating. The dangers and limitations of living in the visible world with creatures as brutish, petty and stunted as humans appear to far outweigh any benefit an aamar might derive from such a lifestyle. In certain citadels, the difference between the amaar and the rajîmi is overlooked and any djinn who abandons the Invisible World for the visible is considered to have broken with the courts of the djinn and is therefore banished. The shayateen, in their self-appointed role of guardians of the Invisible World, are the primary advocates and enforcers of this banishment policy.

Rajîmi

A rajîm is a djinni who has broken with the courts of the djinn. A rajîm has thus been banished by the amirs from the City of Brass and the citadels still under control of djinn society, frequently for antisocial or criminal behavior. The word rajîm literally means "outcast" or "cursed one." They are essentially banished from the Invisible World to the visible. Rajîmi wander the world, though they spend most of their time in cities masquarading as mortals as a means of avoiding conflict with spirits of other houses.

A rajîm may try to pass herself off as an aamar, but one noticeable difference between the two (besides the rajîm's sociopathic behavior) is that rajîmi revel in using their Charms (particularly to trick or abuse humans); it reminds them that they're better than those they've been banished to live among.

Most rajîmi are sociopathically antagonistic toward humans (and, by extension, those who live among humans, including amaar); frequently they are djinn who have been particularly poorly mistreated by mages or who have only recently escaped imprisonment after the War of Enslavement. Rajîmi typically choose one particular mortal as a victim, generally one who has somehow wronged the rajîm in some way, real or imagined. They then use every means at their disposal, including Charms and mortal dupes, to embarrass, harass, and, eventually, destroy their victim.

Rajîmi often fancy themselves judge, jury and executioner to those who show insufficient respect to the Invisible World. Others typically think of them as sociopaths who like to torment their victims as long as possible before orchestrating their final destruction.

Taftâni go out of their way to enslave rajîmi, whom they consider among the most dangerous of all the djinn.

Politics

The courts of the djinn are lightly governed and yet they function more smoothly than most modern human bureaucracies. The djinn are particularly arrogant about this.

While the citadels of the djinn do (infrequently) find themselves at war, it's rare that the conflict goes on more than a few decades — essentially the blink of an eye by djinn standards — and more often than not they fight the war by proxy. If they can get humans to unknowingly fight their wars for them, so much the better. More than a few of the conflicts in the Middle East have been the result of conflicts in the Invisible World boiling over into the visible world.

Nothing makes the djinn band together more resolutely than attacks from the visible world. Djinn have an array of squabbles and feuds, some of which are literally ancient, but should a threat appear from outside the Invisible World, internecine conflict comes to a halt and the djinn turn their collective attention to the new foe. Consequently, no one has done more to unite the djinn than Suleiman. No other human is so hated by the djinn, and there are times when amirs invoke his name to coax feuding caliphs into making peace.

Relations with Others

Djinn prefer to keep to their citadels, but as part of the Spirit Courts, they are obligated to deal with other Umbrood as well. They are disdainful of the simpler spirits, believing them to be little more than drones or automatons. Spirits with free will and some modicum of power, on the other hand, they are perfectly willing to recognize as equals.

Djinn are on very good terms with the Elemental Courts, particularly the Court of Air and the Court of Fire. This, as much as anything, aligns them with the metaphysic principle of Dynamism. Some djinn, particularly the efriti, are on cordial terms with Malfeans, infernalists and other villainous spirits, though such cordiality is watched closely by the amirs and sultans. Djinn dislike excessive Stasis. Spirits with a particularly keen understanding of cosmology assert that principles of Stasis are responsible for the underpinnings of the Tellurian that make the Solomonic Code function as it does.

Djinn Servitude

Unlike most spirits, djinn cannot be bound to a fetish, a talen or in any way harnessed to power an object with their Charms. Mages who want to use a djinn's power must use the age-old Solomonic lore to trap a djinn bodily in a container (the Taftâni rote **Bottle of Djinn** is the exact spell needed, though there is no shortage of variations on the theme). Hermetics and Dreamspeakers may have their own approach, though without the experience of the Taftâni, mages of those Traditions will suffer from slightly higher target numbers than the Weavers, who live and die according to their abilities of harnessing djinn.

The mage must first prepare a container for the djinn to inhabit. This must be created by the mage herself. The vessel may be fashioned out of any nonflammable material and should be at least as large as a man's fist. Glass and metal are the most common materials used for this purpose. Once the material has been shaped appropriately, the mage inscribes the container with whichever of the Solomonic seals is appropriate to the entity to be contained. Generally, the more powerful the djinn, the more complex the seal needed to contain it. This stage is ideally done as an extended effect. The number of extra successes garnered by the mage in excess of the minimum needed to make the container functional makes it harder for the djinn to avoid imprisonment later. That is, if the player scores two extra successes on the casting of the seal, then the djinn must overcome those extra successes to break the binding (see below).

When the mage is ready to face the djinn she wants to imprison, she simply summons the djinn to her using Spirit 3 and then speaks the code word she programmed into the container; the Storyteller rolls the djinn's Gnosis against a difficulty of the mage's Willpower. Extra successes from the forging of the vessel cancel successes on the djinn's Gnosis roll.

If the mage wins, the djinn is sucked into the container where it is stunned for three turns. The mage uses those three turns to seal the vessel with molten lead, which she immediately inscribes with appropriate seals. If the mage fails to seal the bottle in three rounds, the lid pops off, the djinn escapes, and the mage becomes the djinn's enemy number one.

Suleiman

The originator of these binding techniques is known as Suleiman or, in the West, Solomon the Wise. Among Taftâni and Hermetics, Suleiman is considered a figure of near godlike status. Among the djinn he's hated as though he had committed genocide against the entire race of djinn.

It would be enough if Suleiman simply discovered the various means of summoning, binding and banishing spirits, demons and djinn, which he did. It would be enough if he had only catalogued the vast diversity of spirits, which he did. It would be enough if he had just tasked his captured djinn with the protection and service of the human race, which he did.

But those things are only the visible fraction of the true reason the users of Spirit magic hail Suleiman as one of the greatest magi ever to walk the earth. His real achievement, and the most mind-boggling, is the establishment of the Laws of Solomon, the laws of conduct djinn must follow while in the physical world.

Through his years of interrogating djinn and learning their secrets, Suleiman was able to discern the essential nature of the house of spirits to which djinn belong. By formulating a sigil that captured the essence of the entirety of djinndom, he was able to lay down ground rules for djinn as a group when they were in the physical world.

Persistent rumors suggest that he was working on a similar sigil to bind demons when he died. It remains unknown whether Suleiman's death was natural or otherwise, though if demons learned of his plans, it's clear which one was the more likely.

Bottles, Lamps and Flasks

While the Taftâni have gone to extreme lengths to collect them all, it does happen from time to time throughout the Middle East that vessels containing djinn (or other spirits) are found in the desert sand or at the bottom of the sea (the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea in particular seem to be the resting place for many djinni-bearing metal flasks).

Under the Laws of Solomon, the djinni is entitled to freedom if he performs three tasks for the opener of the vessel. If the djinni is of the appropriate power level, that may equate to three wishes. If the djinni isn't sufficiently powerful to grant wishes, it must perform three tasks for its savior to the best of its ability. While it's certainly within the rescuer's rights to draw these tasks out as long as possible, the longer the period of service, the more likely the djinni will begin to resent its rescuer and begin perversely misinterpreting its master's orders. Generally, anything under a month is considered kind; six months is considered average, and any period of service over a year is probably going to anger the djinn enough to provoke troublesome behavior.

If the finder of the flask would rather not deal with whatever is imprisoned in the bottle, she may find that some strange desert nomad is willing to pay more than generously for it. The Taftâni are relentless in their pursuit of such artifacts, and have been known to resort to thievery, threats and Mind effects to get what they want, particularly for bottles containing particularly powerful djinn, which they can recognize from the seal on the outside of the bottle.

Lonely Places

During the War of Enslavement, the number of djinn captured and imprisoned in bottles, alembics, cucurbites, lamps, rings, flasks, jars and caves reached into the thousands. Very few of those have been found, no less freed. There are two reasons for this.

First, most viziers who captured hostile djinn were more comfortable binding djinn than commanding them, so rather than use the djinn as servitors, they simply buried the container as far into the desert as possible or tossed it into the ocean. With the passage of time, sediment covers flasks in the sea and dunes cover the sealed and warded vaults where djinn bottles were kept.

Second, on those occasions when a djinn bottle is found, it rarely stays anywhere near civilization. The reclusive Taftâni aggressively seek out and hoard djinn containers. Naïve humans are frequently led astray into barren regions by djinn and subsequently left there to die, thereby freeing the djinn. Even mages can be led out to barren places to die, but they generally have the last laugh: before they die they can speak the word on the side of the container that forces the djinn back into its prison.

Like pebbles in a river, djinn containers get swept up and carried away from those places where the flow of humanity is greatest, and deposited later in backwaters and on desolate shores.

Personal Pacts with Djinn

It *is* possible to obtain the service of a djinni without resorting to Solomonic binding techniques. This is generally much, much more difficult, particularly since most djinn are understandably hesitant to deal with mages at all, no less to serve them willingly.

A mage wishing to enter into a personal pact with a djinni must first draw the attention of the djinni with whom she wants to parlay. It is considered bad form for the mage to show any signs of ill will (like weapons or enchanted vessels) or bad faith (like wards, defensive magics or other magi). The mage must enter into dialogue with the djinni in precisely the same way as humans entered conversation with djinn before the Solomonic Code was estabished: with extreme respect and deference. The various Solomonic tools cannot be so much as alluded to or the djinn will leave immediately (or attack, if it's of a malevolent breed of djinn).

Once both parties enter the conversation, the mage details what he's willing to offer for the djinn's services. The djinn will then seek to bargain with the mage. If the mage was offering treasure (which djinn love) the djinni will insist that anything less than twice what the mage was offering is a sign of contempt; if the mage was offering services to the djinn, the djinn will expect something akin to indentured servitude in exchange for almost any little help. Unless the mage has been trained in what to expect (as all Taftâni and some Hermetics are), it's extremely likely that the djinn will talk circles around the mage and get the better of the bargain by far. If the mage is smart, he'll start his bargaining experience with less powerful djinn and work his way up as his knowledge of djinn and pre-Solomonic exchanges improves.



What Djinn Want

When a djinn bargains with a mage, more often than not what he's looking for is a sense of sacrifice, a taste of the mage's emotions. Those djinn residing in the Invisible World have very little use for jewels, Ferraris or traveler's checks, but they, as most spirits do, have a taste for experiencing humans' emotions.

Spirits (and ghosts) get a rush from emotions, and different spirits prefer the Resonance or "taste" of different emotions. Most spirits from the High Umbra prefer the tingling that they experience when a denizen of the visible world experiences respect, devotion or a slight sense loss. All gods require sacrifice of one sort or another, and this is how those spirits who are regarded as gods receive the lion's share of their sustenance.

Looked at in game terms, the spirit receives a certain amount of Power from its transaction with the mortal (or other entity...). How much Power the spirit receives depends on the strength of the feeling experienced by the human and how receptive the djinn is to that particular "wavelength" of emotion. Spirits in the Low Umbra (ghosts) are typically more flexible with regard to the kinds of emotion they seek out, but it's also their primary source of sustenance. Djinn and the majority of spirits from the High Umbra can regain Power simply through Slumber, but a taste of adoration or the sense that a mortal has given up something valuable feeds the djinni's ego as well as his reserve of Power. Two millennia ago that might have included incense, gold and salt.

Corollary to this is the fact that what is valuable varies from individual to individual. A poor man giving the djinn his mother's diamond ring will give the djinni a significantly greater rush of Power than a rich man giving a similar or even more ornate ring. In the rich man's case, the djinni might be more inclined to ask for something that may be worth less on the market but is more precious to the mortal — his rare autographed edition of Edward Gorey's *Martini Book* for example. That said, djinn, like many spirits, are drawn to small shiny objects, and if the djinni is choosing between two forms of payment for his services, he's likely to choose the sparkly one. Djinn have an appreciation for natural beauty, especially in elemental objects like raw gemstones or metals, and so often prefer golden lucre over paper money or intangible assets.

On the other hand, spirits aren't stupid, and those living in the visible world (like the amaar) are delighted to accept anything from gold bouillon to Microsoft stock — anything that facilitates the somewhat luxurious lifestyle that most djinn prefer. While they're loath to use their Charms, they prefer that to working. Djinn make excellent workers, but left to their own devices, they prefer to do little more than drift from lavish party to lavish party. The human work ethic, particularly in countries like Germany, Japan and the United States, leaves them boggled. Djinn, on the whole, would rather live lives of leisure, and they'll accept from humans whatever allows them that degree of comfort.

Once both parties come to an agreement, they exchange a drop of blood (or ichor, in the djinni's case), and the deal is complete.

If the djinni breaks the contract, the mage is entitled to appeal to the its superior (assuming he can get an audience) and the djinni may be forced to do the mage's bidding until one or the other party dies. If the mage breaks the contract, the djinni is entitled to appeal to an amir and have the mage's sworn servitude for the same duration, and since djinn are immortal, it's pretty clear how these things turn out.

While such an arrangement gives the mage access to the djinn's abilities, it puts her in considerably more danger than simple binding and imprisonment Rotes. It's not difficult to understand why most mages would rather avoid the personal pacts, though some magi, notably the shamans among the Dreamspeakers, are more comfortable taking that approach to handling djinn than simply overpowering them.

If the mage wants a djinn as a familiar (as per the rules on page 67 of the Mage Storytellers Companion), this is the only way to get that level of connection. It is impossible to imprison a creature and expect it to give the mage the level of service or commitment expected from a familiar. The creature must enter into the arrangement freely and of its own will.

Stereotypes

Taftâni

Only Suleiman himself is more cursed than the damnable Weavers. They are the abhorrent offspring of a scrofulous pig and a rabid dog. While there are other viziers who interact with us, and that frequently, only the Taftâni believe that it is their divine right and obligation to keep us in servitude. And, regrettably, it is their artisans' magic alone that can trap us into long term servitude. Centuries upon centuries have passed and yet they linger on, aware of our presence wherever we go.

There is no love lost between the Taftâni and the djinn, nor is quarter shown or expected when the two come into conflict. They use our kind as slaves, lackeys, guard dogs and tools. They break up our families and treat us like vermin. For their amusement, they pit djinn against djinn, as though we were two scorpions to be placed in a bottle and shaken up. They use us, trade us and give us to their apprentices as gifts, thereby insuring that our servitude is unending.

Perhaps the aspect of the Weavers we find most vile is their immunity to so many of our more effective Charms. The years we have spent in conflict have taught them well how to see through our little deceptions. It is the most dangerous thing about them.

Batini

These viziers we know because they take refuge in many of the same places we do, though it seems we've encountered them less and less of late. They deal with us from time to time. Of all the viziers, they are the least objectionable. They neither treat us as slaves nor are they guileless fools that we can direct like puppets on the end of a stick. They may use Suleiman's spells and seals from time to time, but they apologize for doing so and thank us for our help afterwards. If one must be bound into service, it is best to be so by one of the Subtle Ones.

Hermetics

There is arrogance and then there is Arrogance. These viziers fly on the hot breeze of the latter, and complain when it dumps them unceremoniously in the sand. Their hubris doesn't become them. At some time long distant, these fools must have bargained with the Weavers for their lore, and the Weavers (thrice cursed be they) gave it to them, or, to be more precise, gave them some of it — a few spells, a seal or two — but the Weavers are stingy with their knowledge, and bargain well. Consequently, what these high magicians know isn't all they think they know. It surprises them when their high-handed incantations fall flat, but we're not complaining.

Dreamspeakers

These deal with us not from a position of power, but from respect and humility. Pity them. They believe that the same prayers and rituals that bind and command silly little nature spirits will do the same with us. Their folly is both delicious and entertaining. They are not so skilled at words as we, and it has been known to happen, from time to time, that a shaman has entered into parlay with us only to find out, long after the fact, that it was he who was doing our bidding. These rustics may understand spirit and deed, but words cleverly wielded confuse and trap them.

Vampires

These ghuls hunt their prey wherever they can, and hide from the sun beneath the sand during the day. They are abominations before all that is holy and we do not suffer them to live in our presence. Some have asserted that these things are djinn inhabiting the bodies of dead humans. It is not true and, moreover, the very notion is foul to all djinn. While they do not prey on us, our name has been mentioned in connection with their foulness too frequently, and their destruction brings us only joy and a deep sense of satisfaction. It has not happened infrequently that a djinni has lured a vampire to the desert by night and blown away the sand that hides it from the bright light of the noonday sun.

Shifters

So noble. So idealistic. So brutish and stupid and rash. Like their little friends the Dreamspeakers, the shapeshifters have dealt with a clearly inferior branch of spirits for far too long and it has rendered them...insipid...when it comes to dealing with spirits who are equal, if not superior, to them. If they come asking for a Charm or some bit of knowledge, tell them that first they must go on a long, long quest that involves killing as many Weavers as they can find. When they return, thank them, send them on their way, and refrain from materializing in their presence. They're not all alike, however, so don't treat them that way. The wolves are fanatical thugs and not to be trusted; the cats are sneaky, but not great at dealing with our kind; the lizards are generally noble, if slow, and the snakes...the snakes are best avoided entirely.

Nature Spirits

Like children before scholars, like chickens alongside rocs, so are the spirits of nature compared to us. We possess free will and higher functioning while they are pawns to their station, their predetermined and eternal place in the hierarchy. They are the drones, the brute laborers, the props and tools of the Invisible World. Though they are more numerous by far, we are their superiors in every way.

Charms

Djinn use many of the same Charms familiar to mages who deal with Umbrood to any degree. In addition, they also use slightly modified versions of some Charms and a few that are unique to djinn.

Djinn are most closely related to elemental spirits, and their particular take on Charms will typically reveal which element they are most in tune with. Most djinn are creatures of the air, though the more corrupted ones, the shayateen and Efriti are more inlined to be associated with fire and use fire-based Charms.

Among the "standard" Charms available to most djinn are: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blast, Blighted Touch, Call for Aid, Cling, Control Electrical Systems, Corruption, Create Fire, Create Wind, Disable, Flee, Influence, Insight, Iron Will, Quake and Track.

Djinn cannot use the following Charms at all: Cleanse the Blight, Death Fertility, Ease Pain, Possession, Reform, Solidify Reality, Spirit Away or Umbral Storm.

In addition to the usual charms listed above, djinn know some variants of the common Charms as well as many Charms unknown to most spirits. The Storyteller is encouraged to create new Charms unique to djinn. Most djinn Charms relate either to one of the four elements or to trickery, beguilement and deception.

A servitor is likely to know a handful of these Charms, while a caliph is likely to know all of them. Those rare djinn above the rank of caliph will know many, many more.

- **Bargain**: A djinni may use Bargain at any point in a negotiating process to confuse or mislead the individual she is bargaining with. The djinni spends 2 Power and rolls Gnosis + Willpower against the target's Willpower. If the djinni gets more successes, the target concedes and the djinni "wins" the negotiation. Each time a djinni uses Bargain on a target, the target receives an additional die to his Willpower pool for the purpose of resisting this Charm. This Charm does not work on Taftâni, who are well acquainted with the mind tricks of the djinn.
- **Create Water**: The djinni may create water with a successful Gnosis roll. The amount of water created determines the difficulty. The djinn can create a few ounces of water at a difficulty of 3 whereas filling a dry lake bed would incur a difficulty of 9. Power cost varies between 1 and 5 depending on the amount of water created.
- **Disorient**: By spending 1 Power and winning a contested Willpower roll, the djinni can make her target completely forget every street, building, landmark and geographical feature of the area he's passing through. Everything appears unfamiliar and possibly frightening, even if it's the target's home town.
- **False Wealth**: The djinni using this Charm makes common items appear to be extremely valuable ones. A leaf appears to be a hundred-dollar bill, a rock appears to be a diamond and dirt looks like gold dust. A Perception + Awareness roll against a target difficulty of 9 will see through the illusion, as will Rank 1 Matter or Prime Effects.
- **Flight**: Djinn are somewhat weightier than most spirits and do not gain flight automatically. Spending 2 Power allows a djinni to move vertically as well as horizontally at triple her normal movement speed for one scene.

• **Heal**: Djinn, unlike most spirits, are capable of healing others, though they are loath to do so under any but the most extreme circumstances. The djinni makes a Gnosis roll. Each success on the Gnosis roll allows the djinni to heal one level of bashing damage. Each level so healed costs 5 Power.

Particularly powerful djinn can heal even aggravated wounds, though the Power cost is doubled.

This Charm works only on living targets.

• **Heat Metal**: The djinni makes a Gnosis roll and may spend up to one Power per success to heat one metal item. Each Power the djinni spends heats the metal by one hundred degrees. Four Power will melt lead.

• **Lullaby**: After a hard day of weaving complex magic into everyday items, there's nothing a mage appreciates more than a djinni servitor who can help him drift into a sound, restful sleep.

The djinni sings soothingly to his target, lulling him to sleep. If the target is willing, no roll is needed and he falls asleep after a minute of singing, If the target objects, the djinni rolls his Gnosis in a contested roll against his target's Willpower.

Solomonic Code prevents a djinni from directly *or indirectly* harming individuals under the effects of the Lullaby Charm.

• **Materialize**: Djinn have a stronger connection to the physical world than most spirits, consequently their cost to materialize is less. Calculate the djinn's Materialization cost normally, halve it and round down to determine how much Power it costs the djinn to appear physically.

• **Mirage:** At a cost of 3 Power, the djinni can create a visual illusion of anything she desires. The target can see through the illusion by making a Perception roll against a difficulty of 9. Alternatively, the illusion can be pierced with Rank 1 Correspondence, Matter or Prime Effects.

• **Mislead**: This Charm allows the djinni to make the target see the wrong course of action as the only correct one. As the target is deliberating between two or more possible options, the djinni spends 5 Power and rolls Gnosis. One success makes an otherwise obvious choice unclear. Two successes prevents the target from taking the optimal course of action and three or more successes cause the target to be strongly drawn to the course of action most likely to have an unpleasant outcome.

• **Sand Storm**: For 2 Power, the djinni causes a blast of hot air and sand that blinds one target. For 8 Power, the djinni causes her Rage in bashing damage and blinds to up to ten opponents in the same general area.



• **Sand Swallow**: The djinni causes sand (and only sand) to suck one target down three feet per success on a Gnosis roll. One success will mire an opponent in place while two or more successes will probably result in the suffocation of breathing targets. This Charm costs 10 Power.

• **Smoke Screen**: For 2 Power, the djinn can create a wall of thick, black billowing smoke that obscures all vision. The smoke billows forth from whatever point the djinn chooses, lasts as long as she concentrates on it and cannot be seen through with Rank 1 Effects.

• **Shapeshift**: Djinn use Shapeshift normally so the cost for djinn is only two Power due to their inherently fluid nature.

• **Spirit Away**: At a cost of 20 Power, the djinn takes a person from the visible world to the Invisible World by winning a contested Willpower roll.

• **Teleport:** The djinni can disappear and reappear anywhere else she has ever personally visited. This Charm costs 10 Power.

For twenty Power, the djinn can teleport another as well. All teleport costs are cumulative.

• **Wish Fulfillment:** The most powerful of the djinn are spirits of vast power, on par with Umbrood Lords and Preceptors. If freed from confinement or negotiated with properly, they have the ability to make reality shift in the direction of another's will. This Charm costs 30 Power, and the djinni must make a successful Gnosis roll.

Monitoring the Wishing Well

Few things unbalance games faster than characters with the ability to have one (or more) wishes granted by a djinni servitor. While wishes make for great folklore, they tend to ruin hours of Storyteller planning when brought into the context of a game. Your best bet, as Storyteller, is to allow wishes, but take steps to see to it that game balance isn't completely tossed out the window.

1. Djinn are very rare, even in the Middle Eastern Lands of Faith. Not every bottle, lamp and flask needs to contain a djinni.

2. Djinn are past masters of misguiding and misdirecting those who would have them grant wishes. They are willfully perverse in interpreting the spoken wishes of those who misuse them. No one is immune to the trickery of the djinn. Folklore contains many, many stories of mortals who have their wishes granted and then promptly use another wish to cancel the first wish. If the character only received one wish to begin with, a Storyteller can generate an entire storyline based around the characters correcting some horrible situation that they sent awry by a poorly worded wish.

3. Remember that most, if not all, wishes granted by a djinni last only so long as the wisher controls the djinni. If the character gives away or loses control of the djinni for any reason, any ongoing situation maintained by the wish comes to a sudden and unceremonious end. If the djinni resented the way the character made wishes, she might even go back and break situations out of sheer spite. Djinn are infamous for such petty tactics.

4. While characters may trap a djinn, obligating it to serve the character, the djinn may not possess the Grant Wishes Charm. In that case, the character's order may be carried out, but only to the best of the djinni's ability. For example, if the character gains the servitude of a djinni and wishes for a sultan's palace, it is within the right of the djinni to say something like, "I serve you and you alone master, and I shall have your palace built for you in one hundred years and a year." During the course of that project, of course, the djinni won't be available for other service unless the first wish is renegotiated. Djinn are obligated to serve; they are not, however, obligated to be omnipotent.

5. Ultimately, you, as Storyteller, have every right to deal with wishes in your chronicle as you see fit. This includes not allowing them in your game at all or limiting them in ways that mitigate damage to the storyline. If, on the other hand, the characters wish for things that make the game *more* interesting, it might be fun to see where that takes things.

Just remember: It's a game; it's supposed to be fun. If a character's wish causes the game to go a little out of balance, but everybody's having a great time, don't sweat it. If it's not fun however, for the Storyteller as well as the players, don't hesitate to exercise a little "divine discretion." Heck, you might throw your players a loop by actually granting a wish as desired and then letting them sweat the non-existent consequences.

Storytelling Djinn



Using djinn in your **Mage** chronicle can give your games a whole new sense of magic and exoticism. Djinn are more like humans than most spirits, but expectations that they will be more like humans just serve to highlight their strangeness. The denizens of the Invisible World have social standing, customs, modes of dress and an entire culture of their own. As Storyteller, you get to flesh out that culture as much or as little as you see fit. If you look at your **Mage** chronicle as a moving painting, think of djinn as a new brush that will give your game textures you've never used before.

Djinn make excellent supporting cast members for **Mage**, **Mummy: The Resurrection** or any game using Year of the Scarab books. Their motives and intrigues are at least as varied as humans' are and, given their exotic natures, possibly more so. They can be familiars, informants, slaves, allies or nemeses.

There is one question that falls to the Storyteller that has a great deal to do with how djinn interact with characters: How have djinn fared in the World of Darkness? Have they maintained their arrogance and nobility even in the face of a dark and violent world that's rapidly closing in on them? Do they resist the nihilism that runs rampant through the World of Darkness or do they embrace it? How the romantic nature of djinn interacts with the grim ambience of the World of Darkness determines a large portion of how they might be useful in your chronicle. If you determine that they've remained largely romantic and magical, then they'll be very rare outside Arabia's Empty Quarter and a few other desolate regions of the Lands of Faith. If, on the other hand, they have absorbed humanity's decadent, worldly ways, then there's no reason not to have djinn frequenting the nightclubs of Istanbul, Paris and New York.

The Modern Djinni

Djinn visit the visible world less frequently than they once did. To their way of thinking, humans have done an excellent job of ruining the physical world. Add to that their fear of being enslaved by a power-tripper using the Solomonic Code, and you're left with a whole house of spirits that has all but defected from the visible world altogether.

There are notable exceptions to this, however.

Those djinn who came into being after the War of Enslavement (adolescents by djinn standards) never knew what it was like *before* humans got their hands on Solomonic Code. To them, the visible world is a theme park, a playground and an obstacle course all rolled into one.

Older djinn have tried, unsuccessfully, to convince their juniors to avoid the visible world by telling them horror stories about power-mad viziers and various other evils, but to no avail. Without having experienced the War of Enslavement personally, the dangers of the visible world seem vague and improbable.

The visible world beckons to young djinn. Human cities have a grittiness that the grand citadels of the djinn do not. While some djinn prefer to keep their slumming to a minimum, there is at least one group of djinn, the amaar, who strive to experience what it's like to live like a human. This generally horrifies their elders.

Djinn are not particularly difficult to detect. A level one Spirit effect makes it obvious that the mage is looking at a djinni, but an inexperienced vizier won't know the difference between a djinni and a paradox spirit (for example) without further exploration. Mind magic is the most obvious route to determining a djinni's nature or motives. Djinn can also be detected by sorcerers familiar with the paths of Summoning, Binding and Warding on a Perception + Awareness roll. (You might require a special effect or ritual for sorcerers to recognize djinn if you don't want fairly mundane magicians with "djinn radar." The acquisition of such a ritual could make for a good story hook.)

Young djinn are a relatively easy catch for even an inexperienced Taftâni, though other mages may find it a bit more difficult. A simple container, a simple seal and the djinni's freedom is over. Many djinn don't consider sixty years of servitude to be particularly problematic. It's rarely pleasant, but at the same time, when one measures existence in millennial increments, six decades is nothing. What bothers djinn is being passed from master to apprentice. In such cases, the apprentice had best be highly adept at the Solomonic Arts, because he's extremely likely to be dealing with a pissed off djinni.

Djinn and Human Mores

One particular area in which inexperienced mages often find themselves caught off-guard is that of djinn morality and behavior. The djinn don't *require* food, sex, shelter or the other comforts of humanity. Similarly, they don't rely on customs, mores and religious



taboos that humans use to regulate such behavior and later absorb as tradition.

As a result, djinn aren't above shocking humans, or making petty displays of their own "codes of behavior" which are nothing but amusing ways to entice humans to act in humiliating fashion. A djinni might pretend to be outraged by a human wearing a red hat, for instance, claiming that such practices countenance a grave insult and demanding satisfaction from the human (who likely doesn't know enough to stand up to the frightening djinni's bluff). Similarly, djinn have no compunctions about appearing in the nude, gorging themselves on human foods in supernatural excesses, taunting humans for their taboos and so on. Many djinn amuse themselves with the scandalized reactions of humans who find such behaviors shocking. A djinni who pulls a humorous trick on a human (especially a *vizier*) can expect much raucous acceptance back in the Courts for the tale; nearly all djinn appreciate a good laugh at human expense. Stories relate everything from djinn who seduce humans and then expose their peccadilloes to questing *viziers* compelled into absurd, foolish behaviors like marching about their home towns carrying huge stuffed dolls, wearing blatantly badly-done make-up and cross-gender clothes, shouting obscenities at random passersby. ("Only if you perform this sacred ritual will I be released from bondage and able to help you..." followed by much snickering.)

Of course, djinn aren't *all* silliness and laughter. They're simply not above having a laugh at the expensive of humanity.

⊕Outside Arabia

Fear of being enslaved is what pushes modern djinn out of the Middle East. Walking down an aisle at the Baghdad bazaar, a djinni is likely to be seen by at least three *viziers* or sorcerers capable of imprisoning her. In Sydney, Australia, however, the likelihood is much smaller. While Australia has a respectable population of mages adept in the Spirit Sphere, the native Dreamspeakers don't have the knowledge of Solomonic Code that allows for long-term control of djinn.

As a general rule, djinn can be found in any large, clean city outside of the Middle East. While it's not absolute, djinn tend to avoid cities that are overly dirty or places they know to be popular with Taftâni.

Djinn as Enemies

Djinn are haughtier than they are vindictive. Small slights (e.g., forced imprisonment of two de-

cades, some minor act of cruelty, or a deliberately demeaning task) will elicit a slight narrowing of the djinni's eyes, but little more.

A fair master can command a djinni for decades without provoking any real anger so long as he observes proper etiquette.

On the other hand, when a djinni is abused, kept in servitude for what, in the djinni's mind, is an excessive period of time, or repeatedly forced to perform tasks that could conceivably result in harm or death to the djinni, the djinni's master is treading dangerous ground.

Djinn recognize that they are, in many ways, the ideal servitors. They are willing to serve humans, and even overlook occasional mistreatment. However, once a djinni loses its temper, the individual who pissed it off is in for some trouble.

Direct Retribution

An angry djinni is a terrible thing to behold. It will rage, break things, burn targets and summon storms. It has free reign to do any of these things, provided none of them bring direct harm to the vizier who controls it.

Once free of that control, however, the djinni is free to harass and injure the mage to its heart's content unless the mage thought to specify in the initial agreement that the djinni could not do so. Outside of the Taftâni, it's amazing how few mages think to include such stipulations.

Djinn can hold their own against most foes. Their deceptive and elemental Charms are generally enough to take on most opponents, with a few notable exceptions. The djinn's ability to mislead and deceive is notorious, and Arabic folklore is full of examples of djinn trickery. An angry djinni can stalk her prey from the Invisible World and wait until an important decision is being made, then choose that moment to beguile or deceive her victim. The Mirage Charm is exceptionally effective on enemies who drive. When the djinni's foe is going sixty miles an hour, the mirage only has to be believable for a few seconds for it to be permanently effective. Similarly, a djinni can use its Charms like Create Water to cause all manner of embarrassment and social ruin to its would-be oppressor.

While the djinn are more than capable of leading their enemies down self-destructive paths, if more direct action is needed, the djinni may need to enlist the assistance of others.

Venegeance by Proxy

"I will serve you faithfully for four months and twenty if you will but smite my relentless persecutor."

The essence of djinn strategy rests in that offer. Djinn prefer not to enter combat directly against foes who use magic, so they offer their services to another mage in exchange for his services. This is essentially the same arrangement as a personal pact with the djinni, only it's initiated by the djinni instead of the mage.

Djinn typically make offers like this to mages who do not have much experience with spirits. Not only are they more likely to want the services of a spirit, but such innocents are generally more willing to accept a puny two-year term of service. Djinn always try to get the most from a mage for the shortest term of servitude, and they're both capable and willing to use their Charms to convince the mage to accept terms that favor the djinni. A Son of Ether or Euthanatos mage is much more likely to accept a year of service (and be happy about it) than a Hermetic, a Batini or a Taftâni.

One advantage to this short term of service is that the djinn can make that same offer to five or six mages. Thus, it is entirely possible that a mage who thinks he has only angered a single djinni may find that he has an entire cabal of mages after him.

The Solomonic Code and the Invisible World

Even mages with long histories of using the Solomonic Code to deal with djinn are at a disadvantage when dealing with djinn on their home ground. The Solomonic Code is, at its core, a mystic injunction that determines how djinn may and may not behave while in the visible world. Djinn in the visible world are very susceptible to careful use of Solomonic sigils, wards and commands.

On the other hand, a mage trying to use Solomonic magic in the City of Brass (or other citadel in the Invisible World) will be laughed at and promptly killed. The Solomonic magics have no effect of any sort in the Invisible World. Djinn bound, trapped or otherwise ensorceled while in the visible world are still trapped, bound or ensorceled, but going to the City of Brass with the intent of trapping a djinni servitor will get the mage nothing but dead.

Some *viziers* fear that there may even be a reciprocal code of some sort that dictates human behavior in the Invisible World. So few mages spend any time in the City of Brass (or other citadels of the djinn), however, that such things are simply frightening rumors and loosely founded speculation.

Chronicle Ideas

It's relatively easy to base whole chronicles around djinn and their role in the world. Following are some ideas for using djinn in your chronicle to help get you started:

1. A djinni has recently lost her master. He is still alive and under the Solomonic Code, she is obligated to find him and rescue him if need be. She approaches a Cabal of mages to ask for their help...

2. One of the mages in your game bears a striking resemblance to (or has the same Avatar as) a dead wizard who was especially hated (or loved) by the djinn. Perhaps he abused the djinn in his service or indirectly caused the deaths of many djinn by sending them on impossible missions; alternatively, he may have freed his djinn at the end of his life and the djinn is seeking him out to serve him again. Either way, being sought out by a djinn can be a disturbing experience, especially when the Technocracy is watching with Dimensional Science monitors.

3. The cabal's city may become the new stalking ground for a particularly murderous rajîm. What will the characters need to do to catch a murderer who can slip into the Invisible World at will? If the djinni is particularly high up on the hierarchy of the Invisible World, that only muddies the waters more.

4. The party meets a hostile djinni and, in the course of combat, kills it. The old Taftâni warlord it served will not be happy...

Notable Djinn

Servitor: Rukh al-Adin

Willpower 4, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 4, **Power** 25

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Bargain, Blast, Corruption, Create Fire, Create Wind, False Wealth, Flee, Flight, Heat Metal, Lullaby, Materialize, Mirage, Mislead, Shapeshift, Smoke Screen, Track

Materialized Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Mental/Social equal to Gnosis.

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Cosmology 3, Dodge 4, Etiquette 1, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Occult 2, Subterfuge 4, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1

Materialized Health Levels: 7

Background: Rukh al-Adin was a lowly servant to greater djinn than he when the War of Enslavement broke out. He was sent to harass a caravan that was on its way from Jerusalem to Baghdad. He wondered why there was any hesitation on the part of his superiors. His intended victims were only human, and was he not of the djinn?



It did not go well. Traveling with the caravan was one of the great sand *viziers* named Al-Nabighah al-Zubyani. The djinn was no more than fifty paces from the caravan when an old man with a long gray beard, wearing black robes and a black turban, stopped the procession, took three paces in his direction, and unstoppered a copper cucurbite. Rukh al-Adin was immediately and forcefully blown into the bottle by a wind a thousand times stronger than the dreaded Simoon.

That was the beginning of his servitude. The centuries that followed saw him acting as servitor to *vizier* after *vizier*. There is no role he has not played to wizards: slave and servant, guardian and concubine, secretary and, on occasion, friend.

His current master is an old, old man, a Taftâni wizard who has not yet taken an apprentice. If the old man dies without giving him to another *vizier*, he will be without a master for the first time in nearly three millennia. al-Adin wonders if his freedom is at last at hand, and he trembles at such a frightening thought.

Image: When materialized, Rukh al-Adin looks like a bald young man, swarthy and muscular, wearing only a jewelled wrap around his loins.

Efrit: Dahisha al-A'aittash

Willpower 7, **Rage** 8, **Gnosis** 6, **Power** 45

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Bargain, Blast, Corruption, Create Fire, Create Wind, Disable, Disorient, False Wealth, Flee, Flight, Heat Metal, Influence, Insight, Materialize, Mirage, Mislead, Quake, Sand Storm, Sand Swallow, Shapeshift, Smoke Screen, Track

Materialized Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Mental/Social equal to Gnosis.

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Cosmology 1, Dodge 4, Drive 4, Etiquette 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Occult 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4

Materialized Health Levels: 8

Background: Dahisha was a sentient spirit aeons before humans learned to use even simple tools. She thought they were more interesting than most of the animals, but never paid them much attention beyond that.

When they began using tools, she was pleased. When they became self-aware, she was amused. When they began using primitive magic, she became alarmed. When possible, Dahisha would do what she could to misguide humans and lure them into positions where they would destroy themselves.

While she was never in a position of power, Dahisha never missed a chance to extol the dangers of these overly clever monkeys. During the War of Enslavement, she was one of the cleverest deceivers of mankind. Her favorite tactic involved leading trade caravans away from trade routes with illusory roads and then leaving them to die.

She was trying to do precisely that to a large band of travelers when an old Weaver named Al-Nabigah al-Zubyani, wise to the ways of djinn, trapped her in a copper cucurbite which he buried deep in the sand.

She stayed there until 1989 when an American soldier found the container while digging a hole for an ammunition bunker. The centuries of rage had rendered Dahisha more than a bit mad, and a number of Gulf War casualties are the direct result of her violent temper and hatred for the human race.



The state of the world horrified her. Humans had degraded the djinn into little more than fairy tale creatures. Meanwhile, the humans she rails against so often had created a world stranger than any she had ever imagined.

Given her professed hatred of humans, however, Dahisha seems to spend a remarkable amount of time in human nightclubs, particularly in Egypt, Morocco, and on the island of Ibiza. Not only does she enjoy the music in such places, but they grant her a wide range of potential victims. Dahisha likes to ruin or destroy at least one human life a week as punishment for what those stupid monkeys have done to the djinn. She's rapidly approaching the one thousand mark, and she plans to make it an especially dramatic ruination of a particularly noteworthy human.

Image: Dahisha is an exquisitely beautiful woman with coal-black skin, red lips and bright yellow eyes. On close inspection, it becomes evident that her skin is covered with tiny scales that are iridescent in bright light. Her hair is long and black.

Lord: Al-Dimiryat

Willpower 9, **Rage** 8, **Gnosis** 11, **Power** 80

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Bargain, Blast, Call for Aid, Corruption, Create Water, Create Wind, Disable, False Wealth, Flee, Flight, Heal, Influence, Insight, Iron Will, Lullaby, Materialize, Mirage, Mislead, Quake, Sand Storm, Sand Swallow, Shapeshift, Smoke Screen, Teleport, Track, Wish Fulfillment

Materialized Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8, Mental/Social equal to Gnosis.

Abilities: Academics 5, Alertness 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 5, Cosmology 5, Enigmas 1, Etiquette 6, Expression 7, Intimidation 3, Law 4, Leadership 8, Occult 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 5, Survival 3

Materialized Health Levels: 12

Background: Al-Dimiryat is one of the great caliphs among the djinn. When Suleiman began capturing djinn in vessels of all description, many djinn came to him asking that he make the humans stop. He concedes now that walking through Jerusalem's wards alone was both unwise and arrogant, but at the time it was impossible to guess that humans had developed enough skill with magic that they could do anything to *him*, a caliph of the djinn. Suleiman understood djinn arrogance and used it to his advantage. He was delighted to have such a potent spirit in his service.



Suleiman immediately made Al-Dimiryat his lieutenant and the commander of his rapidly growing army of enslaved djinn.

While Al-Dimiryat was initially angry to be forced into servitude to a human, there was no denying that Suleiman was a wise and kind master who showed his captives and slaves as much respect as he showed his equals. It made him disturbingly easy to serve.

The caliph led Suleiman's djinn forces against other djinn with no hint of remorse or hesitation. Many djinn were trapped in Solomonic vessels and forced to fight for their human masters thanks to Al-Dimiryat's great power and strategic brilliance. Other djinn found his enthusiasm disturbing.

Prior to his death, Suleiman released Al-Dimiryat and most of his higher ranking djinn servitors as a reward for their loyal service.

While many of his fellow djinn wanted to imprison the djinn caliph in a vessel as he had helped to do with thousands of his own kind, Al-Dimiryat's power and standing among the other caliphs kept him from suffering any punishment for his service to Suleiman.

Al-Dimiryat and those djinn who serve him are still looked upon at traitors by some djinn. In the depths of the Invisible World they whisper subversively about "Al-Dimiryat the human-lover."

Image: Al-Dimiryat appears as a swarthy man with a completely smooth scalp. He sports a large golden earring in one ear and commonly wears a finely tailored white suit beneath a long flowing cape of peacock feathers.

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